DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 641 CS 013 854

AUTHOR Thomas, Adele; Fazio, Lynn; Stiefelmeyer, Betty L.
TITLE Families at School: A Guide for Educators.
INSTITUTION International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
ISBN ISBN-0-87207-195-2
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 143p.; For another Families at School book, see CS 013 843.
AVAILABLE FROM Order Department, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139 ($15.96 members, $19.95 nonmembers). Tel: 800-336-7323, ext. 266 (Toll Free); Web site: http://newbookstore.reading.org.
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Demonstration Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Literacy; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Program Descriptions; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Family Activities; *Family Communication

ABSTRACT

This guide describes an exemplary program at Niagara Falls, Canada, Secondary School where parents and children use literacy to strengthen their reading and writing abilities while building stronger family relationships. Parents in the program--many of whom have had negative school experiences--learn about early childhood development, discuss children's literature and reading strategies, and create literacy activities to try with their children. They also focus on parenting, sharing concerns, and working on problem-solving skills. All the while, the parents use and develop their own literacy abilities through activities designed around their commitment to helping their young children grow and learn--in this program, the focus is on the children. The guide describes this exemplary program from its early development and recruitment efforts through its current curriculum. It includes background information on family literacy, suggestions for establishing a family literacy program, and ideas about program structure. Also included are sample lesson plans, lists of recommended books and resources, suggested classroom activities, examples of parents' work, and numerous student handouts. The guide concludes with a discussion of assessment in the context of the family literacy program. (Contains 66 references.) (NKA)

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A Guide for Educators

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Families at School

A Guide for Educators

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Thomas, Adele, 1942-
Families at school: A guide for educators/Adele Thomas, Lynn Fazio, Betty L. Stiefelmeyer.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
1. Family literacy programs—Canada. 2. Home and school—Canada.
I. Fazio, Lynn. II. Stiefelmeyer, Betty L. III. Title.
LC151.T56 1999 99-22766
372.119—dc21
ISBN 0-87207-195-2

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Acknowledgments

Our program, a school-based family literacy initiative that invites parents to collaborate in learning with their children, represented a change in thinking for educators in our district and a significant commitment of staff and physical resources from the community. There are many demands made on educational institutions, but we have been fortunate to find numerous partners willing to make concerted efforts to realize family literacy goals.

Our original exploration of options for development of the program was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the National Literacy Secretariat of Human Resources and Development Canada. Throughout the development period, the District School Board of Niagara (Ontario, Canada) offered another source of support. We wish to acknowledge individuals within the district administration: Sandra White and Tillie Clapp,

school board superintendents whose creative energy and dedication to family literacy were instrumental in opening school doors for our program; and Judy Reid, coordinator of adult programs at Niagara Falls Secondary School, who provided ongoing assistance as we became part of school life. From their efforts we learned that the commitment of individuals really can have an impact on educational change.

Sincere appreciation is expressed to the Branscombe Family Foundation of Niagara Falls for its unstinting support in providing funding essential to the preschool program. Time and again, when public funding for child care did not materialize, the Branscombe Family Foundation filled our need. Without its commitment to families and community, our program would not have survived.

Community support for the program has been essential, and we gratefully acknowledge the generosity of organizations that donated resources and facilities. Cooperative agreements with the school board, community and social services, the local library system, and regional health services have made it possible to house several programs at the school. Thanks to such agreements, the family literacy program has benefited from a stable and comfortable site, and we have been able to concentrate fund-raising efforts on obtaining support for other aspects of the program's operation. Notably, financial support from the Niagara Falls Kiwanis Club allowed us to hire additional child-care staff and obtain program materials.

Our most profound gratitude is extended, however, to the families who have participated in the program, from whom we have learned so much. All have generously shared a portion of their lives with us, and they have genuinely cared about the overall goals of the program. Not only have the parents been our partners in developing the program's content and instructional strategies, but they also have collaborated in recruitment and public relations work, spreading the word about the program whenever they could. Their outreach has done more for family literacy in our community than we ever could have accomplished on our own.

Finally, special thanks go to our editor, Anne Fullerton. Her suggestions for streamlining and clarifying sections of the book were invaluable to us.

Introduction

When we first began thinking about a program for parents, family literacy was a vague idea, a wish we shared with our students, their families, and our colleagues. We had witnessed the struggles of some parents to complete forms to register their children for school or to help them with school tasks. At the same time we saw adolescents drop out of school, unable to manage the demands of parenting and their own education. We knew that there had to be more active support for parents to prevent their distancing themselves from their own and their children's learning.

With time, concepts of family literacy have become further developed, and many ways to assist families within their communities have been devised. Increasing awareness of the family's pivotal role in children's literacy development and school achievement has resulted in a variety of home-school partnerships and initiatives for parent in-

volvement in children's school learning. At the same time, the field of adult literacy education has embraced instructional strategies that involve adult learners in their role as caregivers.

Over the last several years we have been collaborating with parents and their children in a school-based program that focuses on the family as a foundation for child and adult literacy, while celebrating the caregiver's role as the child's first teacher. Parents in our family learning program develop literacy activities for home and school in order to enhance their children's linguistic, social, and emotional development. They come to appreciate the role that home literacy plays in fostering positive parenting, and they also find ways to develop their own literacy.

In developing this program, we were sustained by a shared vision of school as a welcoming place for parents as well as children, a place where parents can advance their own education while collaborating with teachers to extend their children's learning at home. During our conversations about how to make this vision a reality, we began to refine our understanding of working with families and to explore alternate ways in which schools can assist families in continuing their literacy development. We have learned a great deal from the parents and children who have participated in the program over the last several years and, as a result, we have been able to identify some effective learner-centered strategies for family literacy.

This book is offered as a resource for other program coordinators, teachers, teacher educators, and all those interested in working with educationally disadvantaged parents and their young children in order to develop and extend home literacy connections. As educators, we have witnessed parents' strong motivation and commitment to participate in their children's literacy development, based on hopes for their children's future success in school. We also have observed that young, educationally disadvantaged parents frequently give up personal aspirations for education and career because of the numerous obstacles they face in trying to fulfill caregiving responsibilities. The ideas presented in this book represent an attempt to assist parents in resolving some of these obstacles as they work toward personal educational goals while extending their children's literacy development.

In our own program, we have adopted an eclectic approach in consulting North American and European research and reports on effective practice in family literacy. However, the process of program development and implementation has evolved in the context of the needs of a particular Canadian community. We appreciate the experience of other family literacy practitioners who stress the importance of establishing shared literacy goals based on respect for individual family cultures. As such, we have tried to be responsive to the needs of families in our setting. While we hope that readers will find much in this text that is helpful and

adaptable to other family literacy settings, we realize that each program is unique and should reflect the needs and values of the families who participate.

In putting together this book, we wanted to share with readers something of the uncertainty and enthusiasm to be experienced in beginning any new initiative in this growing field of family literacy. It also was extremely important to us that we convey the central role that collaboration with parents plays in contributing to the success of such initiatives. Consequently, in addition to presenting numerous learning activities for family literacy, we have endeavored to present something of the collaborative process and to depict the active involvement of parents as they explore a variety of literacy activities with their children.

The first three chapters of the book include an overview of the development of the field of family literacy, some relevant research in the area, a framework for school-based family literacy intervention, and suggestions for starting a program. A discussion of effective planning strategies based on active, local partnerships also is included in these initial chapters. When we first began, we were eager for insights into theory and research to support our ideas about a family literacy program and to better answer questions raised by interested supporters. We hope the book's first three chapters will assist others who are searching for the same information.

Chapters 4 through 7 take a closer look at aspects of curriculum development and at learning activities in the context of a school-based family literacy program for parents and their preschool children. Because family literacy overlaps the instructional areas of adult and early childhood education, it is difficult for any one teacher to have mastery over all aspects of a family literacy curriculum. Nevertheless, instructional planning in family literacy requires integration of content and skill areas. In our program, we had the opportunity to redesign aspects of traditional high school courses to incorporate our adult learners' family experiences and interests in their young children's growth and development. In these chapters, we have tried to show how it has been possible to bring parent-child interaction into the classroom, along with children's literature, to create a curriculum that meets the needs of all participants.

Chapter 8 offers strategies for learner assessment and program evaluation that we have found help to foster dialogue with parents about their own and their children's literacy learning.

It is our hope that readers will take away from this book ideas they can adapt to a range of instructional formats within their own individual family literacy programs, whether they be intensive, daily programs, drop-in centers for parents and children, or shorter term programs or parent workshops.

Chapter 1

An Overview of Family Literacy Research and Practice

As adults and children go about their everyday activities and routines of eating, getting ready for school and work, shopping, playing, and relaxing together, they continually use language and print. Parents and other caregivers rely on their linguistic competence and the print in their environment to fulfill their role of assisting their children to understand the everyday world around them. At the same time, adult family members engage in a variety of literacy activities for their own purposes. Whether they are discussing the horoscopes in the newspaper, reading a magazine article, using recipes, writing letters or lists, or checking instructions for household equipment, adults offer models of reading and writing to their children. So, we have many mental snap-

shots of the sorts of literacy activities that take place within families and of the parent-child interaction that occurs in explaining, reading, pointing out print in the environment, telling stories, and participating in play. These images constitute the heart of family literacy.

Family literacy, however, has come to mean more than the natural, spontaneous literacy activity in which all families engage. It also refers to a wide spectrum of research related to families and their uses of literacy, and to institutional initiatives directed at assisting families in their literacy development. As such, the concept of family literacy is broad indeed, and it draws on the knowledge and skills of several disciplines and professions. The psychology of reading, sociolinguistics, early childhood education, and adult education have all contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and practices in family literacy.

"The way to reach the child is to teach the parent" was a popular saying in early conceptions and discussions of family literacy. The idea was that by raising the educational attainment of disadvantaged parents, positive literacy effects would be experienced in future generations. According to Nickse (1990), as family literacy approaches received increasing public attention, the terms *intergenerational literacy* or *family literacy* began to be used to refer to programs and other organized efforts designed to achieve this goal. Such programs recognized that children who read and write often have parents who read and write:

> It is hoped that literacy development might be increased with "at risk" populations when family and extended family members are involved together; research from several sources would seem to support this hope. Although there are many variations in program design, there is a basic idea: Educationally disadvantaged parents and children can be viewed as a learning unit and may benefit from shared literacy experience. (p. 34)

During the 1980s, many adult education programs were redefined. It was shown that adults often find deeper personal meaning and experience greater motivation in literacy learning when it is connected to parental pride and competence. Adult literacy programs started to bring together parents to engage in literacy activities that had direct effects on their home lives, that helped them deal with socioeconomic difficulties they might be facing, and that supported them in their efforts to participate in the literacy development of their children. At this time, *intergenerational literacy* also referred to the network of family and community members—including grandparents, siblings, and friends—who take on literacy teaching roles with children.

Several ideas have further broadened our understanding of family literacy, and it has become clear that the complexity of the concept precludes a simple definition (Morrow, 1995). However, in 1994 the

International Reading Association's Commission on Family Literacy did identify the following key elements involved in family literacy:

1. Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community.
2. Family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done."
3. Examples of family literacy might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; keeping records; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading, and writing.
4. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent, or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives.
5. Family literacy activities may reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved.
6. Family literacy activities may be initiated by outside institutions or agencies. These activities are often intended to support the acquisition and development of school-like literacy behaviors of parents, children, and families.
7. Family literacy activities initiated by outside agencies may include family storybook reading, completing homework assignments, or writing essays or reports.

These ideas highlight some general directions for educators, program developers, and those collaborating with families to provide family literacy services. They serve to draw attention to the importance of natural literacy functions as the basis for family literacy development, and they focus clearly on primary caregivers and children. They also suggest a difference between literacy activities naturally engaged in within the family and those initiated by outside agencies.

School Versus Home Literacy

It is important to draw a distinction between school- and home-based literacy. The former refers to the ways in which language and print are used for success in school. Abilities in reading, understanding explanations, and answering decontextualized questions often unrelated to the here and now are commonly expected of even the youngest students entering school. Literacy activities undertaken at home do not necessarily prepare children for the language of school or give them the familiarity with print needed to accomplish many school tasks.

As noted by IRA's Commission on Family Literacy (1994), when literacy assistance is offered to families, often the interest is in the development of school-like reading and writing. The danger here is that approaching family literacy from a school-based perspective may emphasize perceptions of parental deficits rather than strengths, and may lead to a program philosophy that seems to cast parents and caregivers as inadequate in their family literacy roles. Auerbach (1989) cautioned that organizations that offer family literacy services from a "fix it" mindset may be perceived as providing teacher-directed attempts to transmit literacy skills to presumed low-literate, low-skill families. While unintentional, such programs' implicit message to families serves to reinforce parents' sense of disempowerment in relation to school and, thus, to undermine attempts to encourage parental participation in their children's development of school-based literacy abilities.

It cannot be denied that educationally (and often economically) disadvantaged parents frequently lack the literacy skills necessary to succeed in school. Numerous researchers, however, have documented a wide use of literacy among these families and have shown that they frequently engage in enriching activities that require reading and writing (see, for example, Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The challenge for educators is to change our traditional, hierarchical ways of communicating with families from diverse backgrounds in order to make meaningful connections between home and school literacy. In the following chapters family literacy strategies based on collaboration and partnership are presented as the basis for sharing school-based literacy objectives.

Summarizing the Research

In our own work, we have found that respect for families' differences and their unique abilities and strengths is fundamental to a successful family literacy program. In establishing such a program, however, there are numerous other factors that must be considered. Following is a summary of findings that helped us define goals for family literacy intervention and guided our vision of what an effective program should include. Parts of this summary have been included in an overview of Canadian perspectives on family literacy research and practice (Thomas, 1998). It is by no means exhaustive, however. See Dickinson (1994), Morrow, Tracey, and Maxwell (1995), and Taylor (1997) for other summaries of family literacy research.

Oral Language as the Basis for Literacy Learning

Achieving literacy is a complex undertaking in any society. It is influenced by many factors, including family, home, and the broader society,

in addition to individual capacity. For the young child, the emergence of print literacy is intertwined with the development of oral language, and many of the same processes are involved in the acquisition of both oral and written language competencies (Cambourne, 1987; Snow, 1991). Parents and other caregivers, of course, play the fundamental role in facilitating their children's acquisition of oral language, and they do so within the entirely natural context of family conversation.

Understanding the links between family conversation and later acquisition of all types of literacy (including school-based reading and writing skills) has implications for the activities considered essential in a family literacy program. By underscoring the importance of family conversation and the ways in which family interaction affects literacy development, programs can ensure that their settings and contexts for literacy learning reflect the natural ways in which parents communicate with their children.

But how does learning about language through family conversation relate to acquisition of print literacy? In his home- and school-based studies of parents and their 1- to 10-year-old children, Wells (1981, 1986, 1987) notes that, through conversation with a parent, the young child learns not only language, but also how to use language to develop understanding about the world. To illustrate this point, Wells (1986, p. 60) reports a brief dialogue between a 3½-year-old and his mother as they looked into their back yard:

James: I can see a bird.

Mother: A what, love?

James: See a bird.

Mother (whispering): Is there? Outside?

James (pointing and whispering): Yes. See.

Mother: Is he eating anything?

James: No.

Mother: Where?... Oh yes, he's getting.... Do you know what he's doing?

James: No.

Mother: He's going to the...the paper sack to try and pick out some pieces—oh, he's got some food there. And I expect he'll pick out some pieces of thread from the sack to go and make his nest up underneath the roof, James. Wait a minute and I'll....

James: That bird's gone.

Mother: Has it gone now?

James: Yeh.

In this vignette, teaching and learning occur quite naturally to great effect. Parent and child express a shared interest and focus of attention. The

parent's questioning maintains the child's attention, and the parent's extension of conversation provides information from which the child's understanding develops.

This supportive linguistic scaffolding, which parents provide many times over every day, is considered essential to the child's literacy development. Wells's (1986) research also offers support for the connection between parent-child interaction and the young child's emerging print literacy. In a continuation of his 1981 observations of families and their language use, 32 children, their parents, and teachers were observed and interviewed in their homes and at school. In addition, the children were assessed in reading, language, and school achievement at ages 5, 7, and 10 years. The study's results concerning the children's early school achievement are noteworthy. Wells found that reading achievement at age 7 was best predicted by a child's oral language and knowledge of print at age 5. Going back still further, it was possible to consider the children's preschool language experiences, based on records of observations and transcripts of parent-child conversations made years before. These records documented a variety of early literacy events in the home, including parent-child play activities and occasions of parent-child interaction with print (such as using a television guide or listening to stories). Wells's research found that one type of family event, the frequency of experiences related to the child's listening to stories or engaging in "book talk," was one of the strongest predictors of that child's later achievement in reading and oral language.

Wells concluded that reading stories aloud gives parent and child a wider window on the world and broadens the range of language models that a parent uses in conversation with his or her child. Listening to stories allows the child "to go beyond the here and now of the immediate environment into other times and places, into the world of maybe and might-have-been" (Wells, 1987, p. 32).

As in James' conversation with his mother about the bird in the back yard, reading stories with a child requires the interaction of conversation to focus shared interest on a topic and to extend the child's vocabulary and understanding of that topic.

The Family as Educator

The family, then, is where literacy begins and where the foundations of literacy are learned. The conviction that the family's influence on literacy acquisition is critical is based on the view that literacy, rather than a set of skills, is a way of thinking, learned through communication in families (Heath, 1983). How do families carry out this function of literacy teaching? Are there specific teaching activities in the home that are associated with literacy development? Or is the family's influence mainly a general-

ized one of creating positive expectations for literacy achievement? While these issues have been the subject of considerable research since 1990, the work of Snow and her colleagues (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991) and of Purcell-Gates (1995, 1996) offer particular support and direction for family literacy programs.

Earlier research (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986) has documented a wide range of literacy practices in families, regardless of their social status. Some parents rarely engage in sustained conversation with their children; they do not model reading or provide easy access to print materials. On the other hand, other parents are avid readers themselves, are actively involved in their children's play and leisure activities, and routinely read with them.

In order to avoid comparisons based on social class, both Snow et al. (1991) and Purcell-Gates (1995, 1996) studied only low-income families and their children in order to identify patterns of family literacy experiences that might be related to later accomplishment in school-based literacy. Both studies found variability in frequency and range of home literacy experiences. While Snow and her colleagues were interested in aspects of oral language and literacy achievement in children through Grade 4, Purcell-Gates focused her investigation on family reading and writing over one year of home observation and assessment of children's reading and writing achievement through Grade 1.

Snow's research group developed a profile of the "family as educator" that includes five components:

1. The literacy environment of the home—parents' own interest in reading, and the provision of literacy materials in the home.
2. Parental teaching—frequency of interactions such as reading with children or participating in homework, and their manner (negative or positive).
3. Parents' level of education.
4. Opportunities to learn—ways parents promote children's learning by increasing access to other people and activities, using extended family members, exercising control over leisure time, and modeling a variety of personal interests.
5. Parents' stated expectations for their children's success at school.

In classifying observations of parents and their children within this framework, Snow et al.'s aim was to identify how families might differ along the five components, and how these differences might affect children's later reading attainment. Analysis indicated that families who rated highest in the profile components had children with high reading achievement. Overall, between 45% and 60% of children's reading achievement was determined by these elements of the family-as-educator

profile, while school factors accounted for the remainder. That is, the family's influence on children's school achievement was shown to be at least as strong as were school influences.

The Snow research presented examples of parents who were confident about their own literacy and who encouraged their children's reading, although they were not always avid readers themselves and did not necessarily engage actively in "book talk" or read-alouds with their children. Although poor and struggling to get by, these parents were using literacy both to solve problems in their family life and to pursue personal goals. They presented positive models of competence for their children, who came to school well prepared for reading and writing achievement.

In the same vein, Purcell-Gates (1995, 1996) looked at families with young children, focusing on how family experiences specifically with print influenced later school-like literacy in children. Her findings further support the conclusion that parents who read themselves and who read frequently with their young children teach them specific things about print. Consequently, these children come to school well prepared to read, compared to children in homes where parent-child reading is infrequent and parents themselves engage in little or no reading.

These two studies, taken together, indicate that children who achieve well in reading at school generally learn certain things about print at home during the preschool years. Specifically, they have

- a view of reading and writing as enjoyable,
- an understanding of the uses for print,
- knowledge of the structure of stories in books,
- general thinking and questioning skills related to talking about books, and
- letter and word knowledge.

Parent Training for Family Literacy

Perhaps the words of a young parent best summarize the impetus behind interest in parent training for family literacy:

> I always had trouble with reading, and didn't like school. I left as soon as I could. I regret it now, but I want to make sure my child doesn't go through what I did. I'll try anything that will help her.

Teachers have traditionally encouraged parents to help their children in school by reading with them at home. These invitations are frequently taken up by families who already engage in these types of home literacy practices and are quite comfortable with them. It has been suggested, however, that parents who have experienced failure with schooling and

lack confidence about reading with children are more likely to reject invitations to participate with schools or libraries in "read to me" programs (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Toomey & Allen, 1991).

Since 1990, due in large part to growing appreciation for the family's prominent teaching role, schools and literacy organizations have actively sought hard-to-reach families in order to renew and extend literacy collaborations with them. Surveys of family literacy initiatives (Morrow, Tracey, & Maxwell, 1995; Thomas, Skage, & Jackson, 1998) have documented the success of such outreach programs across school, library, hospital, community center, and church center settings. Projects have been organized to provide families with more books in the home, to support parent-child literacy interaction such as shared reading, to offer direct instruction for parents as reading partners for their children, and to provide parents with the means to improve their own educational attainment. Clearly, a wide range of innovative family literacy strategies has emerged to meet distinct needs in a variety of communities.

Family literacy programs may be classified according to a scheme adapted from Nickse (1991) that identifies four types of learner participation:

1. Parents and children together—literacy instruction is offered to both parent and child and both are seen to be the primary beneficiaries of the program.
2. A focus on parents—adults are the primary participants in literacy instruction that includes ways in which they may best develop children's literacy at home; children are assumed to receive indirect benefits.
3. School-based parent involvement—the focus is on the child's literacy development, with adults enlisted to provide adjunct literacy instruction.
4. Community support for family literacy and resources for the general public—little or no direct literacy instruction is offered, but both adults and children are invited to participate in literacy activities or to use resources either for enjoyment or to support parenting (for example, events such as library story times, or "celebrate literacy" activities in shopping malls).

The first two approaches, which involve parents more directly, represent two different levels of intervention that we incorporated in curriculum development for our own program.

Parents and Children Together

The National Center for Family Literacy developed what is often referred to as the "Kenan Trust family literacy model" to address both par-

ent and child literacy needs for home-based or group-based program delivery (Seaman, Popp, & Darling, 1991). It is probably the most widely used model for school-based programs that target adult education and early childhood education together (Benjamin & Lord, 1996). Although individual programs based on the model are tailored to the requirements of individual communities, they all consist of four components:

1. Parents and children are brought together for parent-child interaction through play.
2. All parents and children engage in literacy activities that promote transfer to parent and child literacy at home.
3. Parents are involved in a parent group in which they receive support, information, and referrals, and develop problem-solving skills for dealing with critical issues in their lives.
4. Parents attend adult basic education classes while children attend preschool.

Longitudinal program-evaluation studies (Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996; St. Pierre, Swartz, Gamse, Murray, Deck, & Nickel, 1995) have provided evidence that participation in programs devised along the Kenan model is associated with

- increases in the developmental skills of preschool children in readiness for academic and social success in school,
- gains in the educational level of parents of preschool children,
- parent confidence within the school setting and positive parental perceptions of their ability to be advocates for children with respect to expectations for school success,
- improvement in parent-child interaction through planned opportunities, and
- improvement in parenting skills of adult participants.

A Focus on Parents

Parents as Reading Partners programs are an example of the type of initiative in which direct participation of parents is intended to yield indirect benefits for children. These programs understand that parents often need assistance before they are comfortable with one-on-one interactions in shared reading. Parents must build their confidence about home reading in a range of knowledge and skill areas, and this can be facilitated by personal contact with other parents and opportunities to practice shared reading with coaches (Edwards, 1991; Toomey & Allen, 1991).

While a variety of other instructional strategies have been developed for parents of preschoolers and school-aged children, Goldsmith and

Handel's (1990) model is particularly noteworthy. This model gives parents direct access to quality children's literature by combining shared reading practice, direct instruction, and discussion on a weekly basis for 2 to 3 months. Though participant involvement in book choices and discussions determines the specifics, each workshop session follows the same format:

- introductory book browsing, news sharing, and family recollections
- presentation of a children's book (and a genre)
- demonstration of a reading strategy
- practice in pairs
- group discussion
- preparation for home reading

By using a variety of children's literature, from folk tales to wordless picture books, concept books, poetry, or nonfiction, parents develop a repertoire of skills for reading different types of text with children. At the same time, practice in the use of shared reading strategies—such as generating questions, making predictions, rereading, and relating reading to personal experience—develops familiarity and confidence for undertaking these activities later with children.

In this chapter we hope we have conveyed many of the significant developments in research and practice related to family literacy. As we began our own school-based family literacy venture, we sought to incorporate aspects of this research and these approaches. In the next chapter we describe the implementation of a school-based family literacy program for parents and children, drawing from our own experiences, and identify some key elements for successfully launching such an initiative.

Chapter 2

Before the Program Doors Open

Although schools have traditionally engaged in partnerships with parents on behalf of the literacy development of their children, focusing on families in which both the adults and the children are literacy learners is one of the most rapidly spreading innovations in North American education (Gadsden, 1996). But how may educators work effectively with parents who are identified as literacy learners? The objective of offering a parent-child program raises practical questions about how to identify and recruit educationally disadvantaged parents, where to find space and materials for such a program, and how to staff and coordinate it. This chapter suggests some steps that we found useful in ensuring that our own program doors would open.

Throughout the process of addressing these questions, collaboration is the key.

Although family literacy intervention is now recognized as a successful strategy to attract parents—teens as well as new immigrants and refugees—who might avoid traditional adult-focused programs, educators must still consider new or different ways of teaching in order to support parents in literacy and educational attainment. At present there is little training available to prepare educators for the complex roles they must assume in family literacy programs (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). Overviews of adult literacy education have observed that until fairly recently, adult basic literacy education has been piecemeal, grounded in an educational tradition consisting of vocational training and skill upgrading (Darville, 1992; Fingeret, 1984; Lord, 1994). Since 1990, however, educators have recognized that many adults who have not completed high school need access to general literacy programs in a variety of settings. Increasingly, planning decisions have been guided by the understanding that literacy is a lifelong learning process that must be rooted in meaningful daily activities.

The image of the adult learner also has changed to reflect the fact that significant numbers of adults who may need to return to school are also parents, with a range of experiences and responsibilities. Family literacy intervention can be an effective instructional option for these adult learners, while at the same time providing a necessary component for effective parent involvement in the education of young children.

Encouraging Partnerships

Planning for our program, the Niagara Falls Secondary School Family Learning Program, had been underway for more than a year before we began enrolling parents and their children. However, we had met even before that simply to encourage one another and to brainstorm how to make education more inclusive for young families.

Although family literacy intervention has become more popular, we found that there are still many misconceptions about what such programs involve in terms of family participation and program planning. For us, a substantial commitment in time was necessary in the beginning to communicate to potential partners what family literacy is all about, its effectiveness, and how a school might practically adopt some of its strategies. Because of the personal investment required, it is valuable to find another organization that shares your vision of family literacy and your willingness to make this commitment of time. Our program started very informally with the first author of this book (Thomas), based at a university, and a friend who was a superintendent in a school board. We

soon began thinking about how to solve problems and use our organizations' resources to provide family literacy services. We engaged in collaborative decision making about the type of program, funding options, curriculum development, and site selection, but we also initiated community dialogue to raise interest in family literacy and sought out other organizations willing to explore options for making a commitment to family literacy. At this initial stage, it is important to learn about specific goals of prospective partners so you can communicate your plans for family literacy within the partner organization's mission.

Collaboration with other organizations is vital because the combined resources of more than one institution and the cooperative problem solving of at least two people produce more substantial results than is possible by working alone. Collaboration also reflects the nature of the process of family literacy: It is an invitation to the family and the community to participate in literacy learning.

While the *who* of collaboration will vary depending on the circumstances and opportunities in each situation, several steps will need to be taken as part of establishing partnerships and getting necessary commitments from organizations. First, program developers should work together to produce as clear a picture as possible of the proposed family literacy program, specific in terms of the who, what, when, where, why, and how. Once these ideas have been worked out, it will be easier to ascertain what you will need to make the program a reality.

When you are ready to branch out in search of resources, informal networking with administrative staff in schools and on school boards and with community-based literacy groups can be very helpful. Networks of colleagues in related areas can provide information about state or provincial adult education plans under which a prospective family literacy program might be included. The experience and knowledge of school supervisory staff and workers in other literacy programs in the community also can assist to identify unexplored resources and possible avenues for help in getting started. We always came away from such discussions with a clearer sense of the appropriateness of family literacy intervention for our community and the ways in which we could work together with community organizations to develop our program.

Fundraising activities are indispensable for securing donations to support the initial start-up costs of a program. Try to establish a personal contact with potential funding sources. This usually begins with a telephone call to a lead picked up through networking, and a follow-up letter in which you request the opportunity to make a presentation about the program. (The follow-up also may take the form of a written request for assistance directed to a specific person.)

Be prepared to present your program to community groups, private foundations, and the corporate sector. Whenever possible, these presen-

tations should be *joint* efforts, enlisting the help of partners who are already on board. It is more effective to conduct presentations together before key groups (community and volunteer agencies, a school board executive council, school board trustees) or potential funding sources, because of the impact of displaying an already established partnership. If two organizations are seen to support the program, it is easier to get early recognition of the need for family literacy intervention and an earlier commitment of funds or other resources. Once initial approval from the partner institutions has been obtained, further attempts to explore funding and other issues related to implementation attract other individuals within each organization.

You also will need to be prepared to submit formal proposals for public and private financial assistance. This requires considerable time at the outset. Remember, though, that potential granting agencies usually provide a format for submitting proposals, and once one strong proposal has been completed, it can be adapted for subsequent proposals.

It should be noted, too, that assistance is not necessarily financial. Community organizations, for example, are often able to offer the equivalent of funding in shared facilities. In our initial efforts, we secured an arrangement for sharing early childhood play facilities with a local community group, a contribution from a private foundation for program child care and children's books, and a federal grant associated with International Literacy Year to assist in initial program implementation.

Choosing a Location

For us it was important that we locate our program in a school. Other programs have found that locating in a shopping mall or a housing development encourages attendance, because the setting is accessible and familiar. Nevertheless, we were convinced that caregivers who feel uncomfortable in a school environment and have had negative school experiences need to experience school success and to come to see school as a caring place where they can express and explore expectations and aspirations for their children. We did realize, however, that our choice of site could make recruiting families to our program difficult.

Certain aspects of site selection may be beyond your control: Because of the nature of working with partners who offer free space and facilities, you may be left appreciatively taking what is offered. You do need to hold the line on some aspects of location, however, because accessibility must be considered if the program is going to be successful. If parents cannot get to the program easily and inexpensively, this will become a major obstacle to their participation. Locating a program in an area with access to public transportation is desirable, and it may be possible to ob-

tain funds to purchase transportation passes for the parents who will be school attendees. Programs should consider adding a budget item for participants' bus fare to and from the site. If the proposed location—or the only one available—poses difficulties, raise the issue early so that partners can work together to find a more accessible alternative.

Within the building, at least two rooms are required to accommodate the children's activities and a class for adult education. These rooms must be within reasonable proximity of each other in order to allow parents and children to move easily between the two. The program relies on parents having ready access to children for joint activities and in case of emergencies. It makes no sense to have the two rooms on different floors or at opposite ends of a large school.

Finally, because many valuable activities for parent learning involve meal and snack preparation for the children, access to a kitchen is a definite asset.

Reaching the Target Audience

Several months before you plan to open your doors, and annually thereafter, it is necessary to mount a recruitment campaign that will attract hard-to-reach families. The usual means of announcing a new program—perhaps by placing a notice in the local newspaper or distributing a flyer at the library—are not adequate to attract homebound parents who are often isolated in the community and may not even have telephones. In most cases such parents have found schools to be unwelcoming places, so locating a family literacy program there can be difficult.

It must be emphasized that recruitment issues are never resolved. If you rely on a one-time announcement to attract participants, you will have an empty program when opening time comes. Instead, be prepared to mount several minicampaigns that include phone calls, home visits, and several types of advertisement. Every year we start afresh in mounting recruitment efforts to ensure that we have got the message out to new parents in the community.

Though it takes extra effort, personal contact with potential participants through community workers and others who have direct access to families is most effective. Develop strong working relationships with public health nurses, church groups, day-care center staff, and family services workers in your area; all of these colleagues can help to deliver a message that will make the program sound appealing to parents. Guidance counselors at high schools throughout the area should know about the program so that they can inform students who may be in danger of dropping out because of child-care responsibilities.

Good sources of initial referrals include local social service agencies, the local health council, local day-care facilities, church groups, and community organizations located in housing developments.

Advertising Helps

Although it can be expensive, advertising in local shoppers' circulars is a good way to attract young parents. Flyers can be effective, if they are written in simple language and are placed where families are likely to visit (an example of a flyer we developed appears in Figure 1). Hand delivery to feeder elementary schools in the area may make it possible to send a flyer home with each child. Flyers also can be dropped off at libraries, local coin laundries, grocery stores, banks, second-hand stores, and community centers. It is very worthwhile to chat with personnel at these places, to make them aware of the program so that they will mention it to customers when the occasion arises.

Figure 1 Flyer Announcing Our Program

Come Back to School & BringYour Child!

Who? Moms and/or Dads with young children

Where? Maple Street School
5100 Maple Street
Niagara Falls, Ont

When? Monday - Friday
12:15-2:45 Feb.- June
Call anytime to join.

How? Call 354-6713
between 9am & 4 pm
for information or
an appointment

Why? Earn two Secondary School credits:
Parenting & Nutrition

Cost? NONE!
Child care FREE also!

You and your child deserve this opportunity!

A Day at the Family Learning Program

Each day begins with fun songs and activities for parents and children to do together.

The children then go to the preschool room where they play with friends and have fun. They are introduced to many children's books, songs, and language and physical activities in an active play setting. The teachers are fully qualified and experienced. Children are prepared for school in a caring environment

Meanwhile, parents participate in family learning activities such as craft and activity making, children's reading, enhancing parenting skills, and nutrition activities. Parents learn how to develop communication skills with their children and how to foster language, social, and emotional growth of their children.

At the end of the afternoon, parents rejoin their children for play time.

DSBN District School Board of Niagara

Family Learning Program

For Parents and Young Children

A Stamford Collegiate course located at Maple Street School

Teachers: Betty Stiefelmeyer
Lynn Fazio Kathie Barfield

Figure 2 Excerpt From a Local Newspaper Story About the Niagara Falls Program

Program Helps Parents and Kids Communicate

Mom says she didn't know how to cook, didn't read to her child, and often lost her temper. Her son didn't know how to share, had trouble communicating, and wouldn't listen.

"If it wasn't for this program, I'd be sitting at home being bored." Sue found help when she enrolled with her son, Jamie (names changed), in the Family Learning Program at Niagara Falls Secondary School.

Parents and their children are learning essential skills, such as communication, literacy, and the importance of good nutrition. The program allows parents who dropped out of high school to return with their preschool aged children. They earn two high school credits each term and can enroll in the program twice to earn a maximum of four credits.

Amy Jones, mother of three, has learned different strategies of discipline and many creative activities. Her 2-year-old has learned to enjoy reading as well as how to name shapes and colors—things that Amy thought she was too young to grasp. "I wish they would have had a course like this 10 years ago."

From Kavanaugh, C. (1994, June 13). Program helps parents and kids communicate. *Niagara Falls Review*, p. 1.

These efforts do pay off. Most of our first students enrolled because they heard about the program through such channels. When the program begins, current students become the best source of referrals, recommending the program to other young parents.

Once the program is in operation, newspapers can offer a further type of advertising. We have learned that local newspapers are often eager to print human interest stories. If you are willing to establish contacts with newspapers, it is possible to get front-page coverage every year. Our requests that a reporter visit the center have resulted in almost full-page coverage of events such as the introduction of the program to the community, shared reading, parents' graduation, a magic show for families, and a session on ensuring children's safety around pets. An excerpt from one such story appears in Figure 2.

Try It, You'll Like It

Once names of parents have been received from referral sources, responses to flyers, and the like, a follow-up phone call (or a home visit to families without phones) by the teacher will introduce the program with a personal contact. Parents should be invited to participate as an opportunity to meet other parents with young children, to provide a group play experience for their child, and to further their own educational goals—and, in the case of our program, to earn high school credit. Parents need specifically to be encouraged to drop in with their children to see the play setting, as they are often reluctant to enter a secondary school and are usually less interested in earning academic credit than in the ed-

ucational opportunities and social experiences the program offers for the children. They should be reassured that they can try the program for a week with no obligation to stay. This seems to relieve the pressure some parents feel and ease their decision about making a commitment.

On a visit to the site, parent and child are able to see the layout of the school and the family learning areas, to find out more about the program and have their questions answered, and to meet the adult and early childhood teachers. Both teachers should be available to discuss the program routines and to suggest ways that participation will benefit the family. Children are encouraged to play with and explore the equipment and facilities while the early childhood teacher describes some of the activities planned for them and answers parent questions.

In such sessions, parents see that the family learning environment is not what they have encountered before in school. In our experience, children are usually not at all reticent about exploring and enjoying their first visit to the program, and seeing this is very reassuring for the parents.

Parents will express some general concerns at this time. Be prepared to answer questions such as these:

- *I don't have a car and I don't know this neighborhood very well. Can I catch a bus nearby?*

  As already mentioned, access to the site is an important factor in program planning. Details of bus schedules, routes, and fares should be available for visitors, along with explanations of any vouchers you might have been able to obtain for program participants to offset the cost of public transportation.

- *Is there a safe place I can store our things (coats, boots, and so on)?*

  If the program is based in a school, parents can often have access to lockers. Regardless of the setting, however, it is important that some secure area be set aside for participants' personal belongings.

- *My child is not toilet trained. What about diaper changes?*

  Unless the program is extremely well staffed and funded, parents will need to pitch in to change diapers, even if it means leaving their own program for a short period, and to provide their own diapering supplies. (We also keep emergency supplies on hand.)

- *My child won't leave my side. How can I go on my own to a class in a different room?*

  This is a common concern. It is important to reduce parent anxiety and confusion about a child's initial difficulty in separating. Programs often ease the transition by starting with activities in which parents and children are together,

and then allowing for a period in which parents help their children settle into play before leaving for their own class. Parents can remain if separation anxiety is heightened, but they are encouraged to let the teacher manage the situation. With calm acceptance, all children gradually adapt to the new surroundings and begin to enjoy themselves.

- *What about lunch and snacks?*
  Eating arrangements will, of course, depend on facilities, funding, and organization. In our program, snacks are provided for the children, and families are welcome to eat their own bag lunches in the family room before activities begin. They can also purchase food in the school cafeteria and eat there, if they choose.

On-Site Contacts

Even after visitors enter the school, it is possible to lose them. One mother related that when she came to inquire about registration, it was the first time she had been in a school building in many years and she felt as small as her 3-year-old who accompanied her. She got so anxious because she did not know her way around the building that she left. Only because she knew that the children's portion of the program would really benefit her child did she return to try again.

It is necessary to establish procedures at the site's office—whether school or another facility—so that families will receive personal attention. Such offices can be busy, intimidating places for all students and particularly for those who may have had numerous negative school experiences. It is therefore especially important to make sure that front office staff are fully acquainted with the program goals to ensure that inquiries about the program—whether by telephone or in person—are received positively. All staff should make special efforts to encourage parents to come in for a visit.

Individuals who appear at the office should be referred to a staff member who can escort them to the family learning area. This personal contact and the informal surroundings of the program space itself create a supportive, encouraging first impression for parents who are often not at all sure that they can make the commitment to return to school. When parents do express a need for time to think about registration, this personal contact also makes it possible to arrange a follow-up call or visit.

Staff Selection

Because family literacy has roots in research on early literacy development and early childhood education, it is common to associate ele-

mentary school educators with family literacy interventions that involve parents and young children. In programs that encompass the current, broader understanding of family literacy, however, the added competencies of educators skilled in working with adults are required to ensure that the learning needs of parents are met. Furthermore, because of the many and complex goals of a comprehensive family literacy program, individual staff members must be able to coordinate several components of the program. When family literacy moves into a high school to meet the educational needs of parents and their preschool-aged children, the combined competencies of adult and early childhood educators who are able to plan and teach as a cooperative team should be emphasized.

Our program has an average enrollment of 12 to 15 adults, and usually more children. Based on our experience, one adult educator is needed to provide daily family literacy instruction. Additional adult education should be available on an individual basis for students taking basic skills upgrading or high school equivalency courses. A certified early childhood educator conducts the children's program, with assistance to ensure an adult-to-child ratio of approximately 1 to 8.

Adult Education Teachers

Educators with experience in adult basic education, family studies, or English as a second language may offer strengths in areas of the curriculum that involve parenting and learner-centered instructional approaches aimed specifically at adults. Our experience suggests that interpersonal skills are the adult educator's most valuable asset, necessary to ensure that families feel welcome and encouraged in learning. Such skills include the ability to convey respect for the life experiences of the parents who enroll, a commitment to collaboration within the learning environment, and a communication style that builds self-esteem in parents, who often feel inadequate in the instructional setting, and in their children. A teacher with these skills will have personal traits that include sensitivity to individual family cultures, respect for individual learners, and a sense of humor. Additionally, the ability to work as a member of a team, to share decision making and engage in cooperative problem solving, along with a willingness to try a variety of learner-centered teaching strategies are key aspects of teacher success.

Essential qualifications for the adult educator in a school-based program include the appropriate professional credentials, but experience in working with educationally disadvantaged adults and in teaching adults at a range of ability levels, from low literacy through secondary school diploma, is also a necessity.

Teachers for the Early Childhood Program

Early childhood teachers in family literacy programs should have strong backgrounds in child development and experience in teaching young children as well as in working with families. Minimum educational credentials for this position are equivalent to those expected of a child-care supervisor. Teachers in this part of the program provide guidance for young children and should be models of positive interaction; they also need to offer support to parents and opportunities for consultation. As well, the early childhood educator will design and monitor the early childhood program and collaborate in planning for joint parent-child learning activities. We have found that certification in early childhood education at the bachelor of education level provides an educational background suitable for the demands of program development, teaching, and consultation. It is also an asset for the early childhood educator to have completed additional course work in developmental delays or disabilities (for example, speech or language delays, hearing problems, attention deficit disorder).

The early childhood teacher must be able to develop a stimulating learning environment for young children and to collaborate with parents who will take an active role in the daily learning activities and routines. Interpersonal skills including strong communication abilities, a willingness to work as a team member, and a commitment to parent involvement are therefore necessary for this position.

Curriculum Planning and Decision Making

In the bustle of managing financing, physical space, and partnerships, it is easy to overlook critical decisions about what exactly will occur in the learning environment. Nevertheless, time must be found early in the planning phase to formulate program goals that will guide curriculum development. It is not until all members of the team sit down together to clarify specific aspects of the nature of the program and its learning expectations that a clear, shared understanding of the program can emerge.

It is necessary to engage in team planning of the curriculum *before* the program opens. Early childhood and adult education staff should begin meeting on a regular basis at least a few months prior to opening in order to establish core aims for the program, to develop basic routines, to share resources, and to explore ways in which team-teaching strategies can be enhanced. We are still in the early years of family literacy program development, and there are few established procedures and little previous experience from which to draw. Staff need extra time to prepare themselves for a new learning environment.

During this planning process collaborative problem solving should be encouraged, so that discussion will draw from different perspectives and decision making will become the shared responsibility of all team members. And it should be kept in mind that the team extends beyond the program staff. For example, we experienced a conflict in this early planning period. Because our program would grant credits to successful adult participants, high school administrative staff expected us to establish course achievement criteria involving traditional assessment based on grading homework assignments and exams. We were convinced, however, that all learning activities in our program needed to be meaningful and useful in the daily lives of our participant families. We also hoped to be able to assist the adult learners in gaining the confidence and literacy skills necessary to continue their education through more traditional channels.

In the end, this tension between requirements for traditional assessment on the part of one of the program partners (the school administration) and our understanding of family literacy initiatives as learner centered, relevant, and based in participants' real lives and needs had a beneficial influence. We always gravitated toward family learning concepts that engaged adults in things they could do immediately with their children and that offered choice and control to learners. As a result of our collaboration with program partners, however, we also reviewed these learning activities in order to determine how they might be used for assessment purposes. Consequently, early in program planning we developed a mindset for student assessment based on observation, work samples, and portfolios that engaged our adult participants in self-evaluation.

As part of the planning process, we established an initial set of desired learner outcomes that guided much of our exploration of resources and instructional strategies. Our primary program objectives focused on providing a learning environment that would assist parents to make literacy connections with their children and to develop confidence about their own educational futures. Our goals for learner outcomes have not changed significantly since the program began. In the area of literacy development we wanted to ensure that adult learners would gain the ability to

- understand the importance of parent interaction in literacy and language development during early childhood,
- appreciate the importance of early literacy experiences for their child's later school readiness,
- identify a range of parent-child play and communication activities that foster literacy development,
- direct parent-child interaction at home to include a wide range of literacy activities,

- engage in shared reading and read-aloud activities at home on a routine basis,
- model effective reading strategies to foster their child's comprehension, and
- read and discuss with other parents at least 10 new children's books.

In the area of parenting, we wanted our learners to develop skills that would enable them to

- appreciate a focus on a democratic family atmosphere, based on encouragement, mutual respect, discipline realistic for their child's developmental level, firm limits, offering choices, making suggestions, and joint decision making;
- identify effective strategies for parent-child conflict resolution across a range of situations and settings, including meal time, sleep, play, health, and safety;
- apply active parenting skills in parent-child interaction during program time;
- report on the use of effective parenting strategies at home;
- understand that literacy activities are also a problem-solving strategy for effective parenting; and
- engage in a variety of reading and writing activities (journal writing, reading articles on parenting) as a source of ideas and organizers for effective parenting strategies.

After our initial planning, we spent time as a team revisiting the structure of a typical week and the daily routines in order to think through what the significant parent-child learning objectives for a semester should be. We reviewed literature about family literacy programs in order to select components of formats and resources that fit into our goals and objectives. (A list of resources that may be helpful for identifying a variety of family literacy program options is provided in Figure 3 on page 28.) As a beginning, the family literacy model developed by the National Center for Family Literacy appealed to us because it suggests a basic program structure that allows opportunities for parent-child interaction, "Parents Together Time" (PTT), and individual goal setting for adult educational attainment.

With a modest budget to work with and an endorsement from a school board, we were ready to begin a family literacy initiative that specifically encouraged young parents to return to school. Our daily, half-day program would offer adults the opportunity to earn two high school

Figure 3 Additional Resources for Program Development

Brizius, J.A., & Foster, S.A. (1993). *Generation to generation: Realizing the promise of family literacy.* Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Family literacy (Special issue). (1995). *Journal of Reading, 38*(7).

Family literacy (Special issue). (1995). *The Reading Teacher, 48*(7).

Goldsmith, E., & Handel, R. (1990). *Family reading: An intergenerational approach to literacy.* Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Holt, D.D. (Ed.). (1994). *Assessing success in family literacy projects.* McHenry, IL: Delta Systems.

Matthias, M., & Gulley, B. (Eds.). (1995). *Celebrating family literacy through intergenerational programming.* Wheaton, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Morrow, L.M. (Ed.). (1995). *Family literacy connections in schools and communities.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Taylor, D., & Strickland, D.S. (1986). *Family storybook reading.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Terdy, D., & Bercovitz, L. (1989). *Home English literacy for parents: An ESL family literacy curriculum.* Des Plaines, IL: Northwest Educational Coopertive. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 332 560)

Weiss, H., & Jacobs, F. (Eds.). (1988). *Evaluating family literacy programs.* New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

credits each semester in an inviting atmosphere where they and their children could explore and expand their literacy learning while validating their family experiences.

With the help of our school board partner, a home for the program was found in an adult education center located in a low-income neighborhood accessible by public transportation. With cooperation from the school's administrators, staff, and custodians, arrangements for accommodations were settled, and long-forgotten furniture, shelves, and other equipment were found. After a lot of preparation, the program doors were ready to open.

Chapter 3

Getting Started

The collaboration and cooperation of the planning process described in the previous chapter is extended when the program opens its doors. Now the staff should call on the program's adult participants to collaborate in making decisions about physical arrangements and learning activities, and to share concerns about the children's needs. Ongoing shared decision making is essential if parents are to establish a true sense of ownership of the program. Through such collaboration, parents also build relationships with one another, allowing cohesiveness to develop in the group. A positive environment for learning will be created when all participants—staff, adults, and children alike—feel that they are involved and valued.

In this chapter we present an overview of the structure and routines of our program. Subsequent chapters focus on specific curriculum components, resources, and parent-child experiences related to reading and parenting.

Overview of Program Format and Setting

As described in Chapter 2, our family literacy initiative took the form of a daily, half-day program based at a secondary school that had been identified as an adult education center. The building is located in a working-class, urban community. By collaborating with our school board and administration partners, it was possible for us to gain accreditation for a format that promotes parent-child interaction and adult literacy learning. Staffed by a high school teacher and a preschool teacher, the program is intended for parents who have not completed secondary school. Up to 15 adults are able to enroll in the program and earn two high school credits, one in Parenting and one in Domestic Foods. The two credits have been integrated within a family literacy framework, whereby learning outcomes related to nutrition, parenting, and literacy are grounded in the everyday experiences of families and are tied to weekly themes that are meaningful to parents and children.

We were correct in anticipating that educationally disadvantaged parents would be drawn to our program—despite its high school setting—because it matched their family aspirations rather than what we presumed to be their occupational goals or educational needs. Most of our parents have been single mothers between the ages of 17 and 33 years.

Because the program focuses on parent-child and adult-adult interaction, the classroom setting was modified to encourage an informal, social atmosphere for caregivers and children. The large "family room" has couches, work tables, children's toys, and books. The children's books and craft materials are available to parents on a sign-out basis for home use. Bulletin boards and window spaces, decorated by parents and children, display the work of both. Parents also use the school's kitchen facilities one afternoon a week for the Domestic Foods component of the program.

A second room, located across from the family room, is well stocked with children's play materials and play centers, including indoor equipment such as tricycles and climbers. By establishing a partnership with a day-care program that offers half-day activities for young children learning English as a second language, we were able to obtain use of this equipment at no cost: The day care was invited to locate at the secondary school site free of charge in the mornings, and we use their play materials in the afternoon.

Our integrated, weekly schedule seeks to maximize literacy opportunities based on peer dialogue and parent-child interaction. Parents and children know that each 3-hour session will follow a consistent routine:

- Circle time for parents and children in the family room, 20 minutes
- Parents and children together in the play room, 15 minutes
- Parents alone in the family room or kitchen and children alone in the play room, 2 hours (including a 10-minute break for parents and a snack time for children)
- Parents and children together in the play room, 25 minutes (including dismissal)

The program has four distinct literacy strands each week. On Day 1, in the strand called *Make-Try-Take*, parents develop and discuss activities for home and school play with children, based on weekly themes. After early experiences with teacher-selected themes, parents choose and develop their own. Products of these activities are collected in child portfolios. Day 2 focuses on *Family Reading*. In addition to shared reading during circle time, specific instruction is offered on children's literature and reading strategies. Parents engage in a variety of reading and literacy activities for in-school and at-home times with their children. *Parenting*, the strand for Day 3, gives parents the opportunity to read and discuss a range of topics related to effective parenting and to explore selected parenting strategies. Finally, on Days 4 and 5 the focus shifts to *Nutrition*. Parents discuss family nutritional needs and meal planning and develop cooking skills in an equipped kitchen. The last day of each week is also a time for independent work to complete learning activities.

Parents complete directed activities, both at home and in school, as part of course credit requirements. These activities support family literacy goals by focusing on parent-child interaction and meaningful use of literacy for personal and family development. In addition to activities associated with the strands listed above assignments might include keeping a family scrapbook, creating a family tree, journal writing, preparing book reports on children's literature, running circle time, organizing a Make-Try-Take day, and creating family menus. Details of such activities are provided in later chapters.

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

When parents first enter the program, it is important to appreciate their uncertainty and anxiety about being back at school, meeting new people, and wondering how their children will react in this new environment. As one parent in our program noted, "I felt so out of place on the first day of school. Everyone seemed to know what they were doing, ex-

cept me." It is also important for staff to understand that motivations for enrolling are different, but most parents will commit to the program because they feel it will benefit their children:

> "I thought the program would be good for Lindsey. She's too attached to me."
>
> "I thought this program would help him play with other children. We don't get to see anyone his age."
>
> "I really needed to get out of the house. I would like to meet other people."

If a program creates an accessible, inviting, informal learning environment in which *all* participants can experience success, parents will lose their initial uncertainty about returning to school. The children usually settle in quickly, with parents noting surprise that their toddlers are so insistent on going to "school" each day.

The first priority should be creating a welcoming atmosphere in which parents and children feel relaxed, valued, and able to participate in all activities. A *staggered entry* during the first week helps families ease into the routines of the program and become acquainted with others. During the first week of our program, half the group meets for 2 days and the remainder for 2 days, and then they join as a whole for the first time on the last day of the week. This allows the children to settle in gradually—which is important for the parents, too, because their first concern is often "Will my child like it here?"

During the staggered-entry week, the focus is on parents and children together, rather than on adult learning expectations. Everyone gathers in the family room, parents introduce themselves and their children, and name tags are distributed. The preschool teacher then introduces circle time (which opens each session of the program), and all participants sing familiar songs together and learn new ones. Some favorites we use in this entry week are "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round," "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," and "See the Sleeping Bunnies." The words for the last song, which may not be as well known as the others, are as follows:

> See the little bunnies,
> sleeping 'til it's noon.
> Shall we go and wake them
> with a merry tune?
> Sleep so still.
> Are they ill?
> Wake up little bunnies,
> hop, hop, hop.
> Wake up little bunnies,
> hop, hop, hop.
> Wake up little bunnies,
> hop and stop.

The children love this song because while it is being sung, they choose a spot on the floor, pretend to be bunnies, and act out sleeping, waking up, and hopping. Later, the words change to introduce different animals, actions, or sounds.

The preschool teacher also introduces shared reading. Some books that have been early favorites of parents and children alike are listed in Figure 4. In addition, at this time the teacher invites the children to choose (with their parents' help) a symbol that will identify both their personal storage areas and any arts or crafts they will create later in the program. This makes the children feel important and valued from the outset. Their use also establishes early personal associations with print. Later in the program, children's names are written alongside the symbols. Examples of the symbols we use are shown in Figure 5 on page 34.

After circle time during staggered-entry week, parents take their children to the play room where they explore and play together, letting each child have the lead in deciding what interests him or her. Our large children's room contains a variety of typical early childhood play centers and materials, including a house, indoor sandbox, water-play area, paint, large and small blocks, dress-up area, and puzzles, as well as a slide, mats, and tricycles.

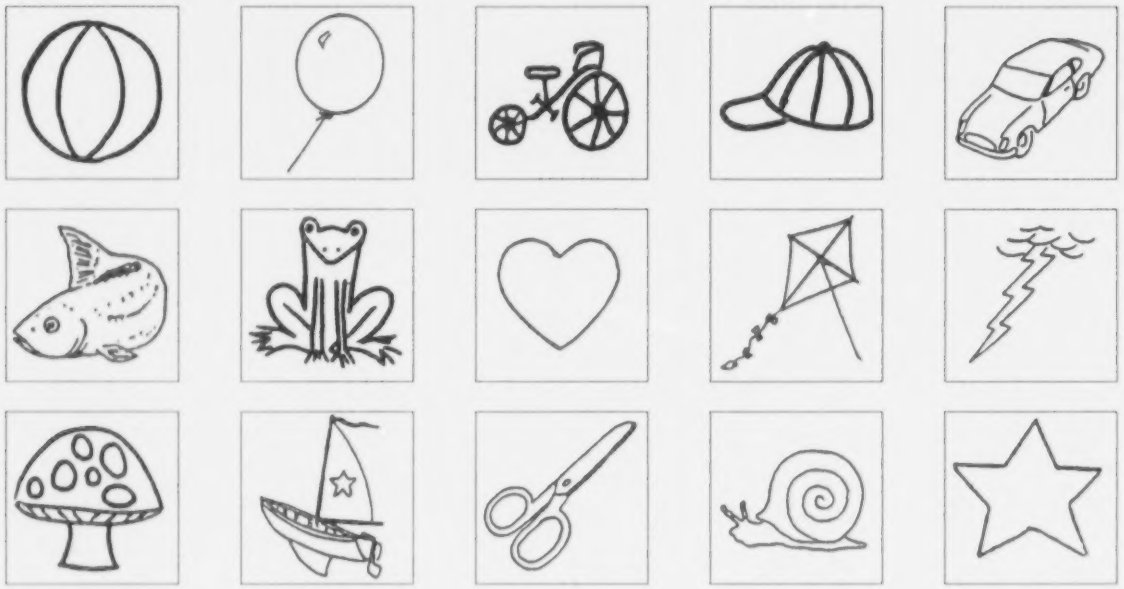
Parents are encouraged to leave their children—initially for short periods—and they gradually become more relaxed about doing so. At the same time, the children begin to become accustomed to the new play environment, the other children, and the teacher. In the early days of the program, parents whose children have difficulty separating may remain until the children's snack time. When the program routine is established, however, parents will return reasonably quickly to the family room for Parents Together Time (PTT).

The program's adult participants are encouraged to think of the family room as theirs, and questions about bulletin boards, use of shelf space,

Figure 4 Some Recommended Books for Early Shared Reading Experiences

Alexander, L. (1990). *I want to go to school too* (Sesame Street). Racine, WI: Western.
Bernthal, M. (1994). *Baby Bop goes to school.* Allen, TX: Barney Publications.
Hill, E. (1984). *Spot goes to school.* New York: Putnam.
In My Kitchen. This teacher-made book contains cut-out panels from boxes of cereal, cookies, pizza, pie, and more. The children delight in being able to read this book on their own.
Kraus, R. (1971). *Leo the late bloomer.* New York: Crowell.
Martin, B. Jr (1995). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Henry Holt.
Martin, B. Jr, & Archambault, J. (1989). *Chicka chicka boom boom.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Mueller, V. (1991). *Monster goes to school.* Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman.
Munsch, R. (1986). *Love you forever.* Willowdale, ON: Firefly.
Rogers, F. (1985). *Going to day care.* Toronto, ON: General.

Figure 5 Children's Personal Symbols



and furniture arrangement are theirs to decide. An important aspect of fostering a sense of belonging is building in time for the adults to get to know one another and to begin making choices about their immediate activities. In the first week, the adult education teacher outlines the schedule and explains the four program strands. Parents must also plan the children's snacks, which they will make in cooking assignments. Particularly in these early days of the program, they are invited to talk with others about how their children are settling into the new environment. There are coffee- and tea-making facilities in the room, and the daily 10-minute break gives the parents a chance to chat informally. They are also encouraged to arrive before the program begins for subsidized lunches in the school cafeteria or to use the family learning room as a quiet place to eat with the children.

Finally, during staggered-entry week, each parent is welcome to speak with a school guidance counselor, and we prearrange a block of appointments with that department. "It's been years since I've been back to school. I'm not sure how many credits I need to graduate. I don't know how to go about it," are typical statements and concerns expressed by our participants. Guidance counselors are available to speak privately with individual students to review academic histories and to discuss course options, requirements for graduation, and other issues. The adult educator encourages each parent to give feedback on this interview in order to

initiate monitoring of the parent's impressions of what is needed and to establish liaison activity with the guidance office for educational and career planning.

Establishing Guidelines for Group Participation

At the start, the adult education teacher restates the objectives of the program in terms of its aim to provide learning opportunities that build on parents' experiences and strengths while allowing autonomy and choice. Parents appreciate recognition of their maturity and life experiences, and a discussion usually opens with some sharing of how and why they decided to enter the program.

It is also important at this time to attend to some general administration. In our case, we clarify that any overall school rules apply to parents, too, because they will come in contact with other students and school staff outside the family learning area in the course of the program. Parents also need to realize that they must be within reach at all times in case of emergencies with their children and to understand that our request that they inform the teacher of their whereabouts during program time is a reasonable one and is in their children's interest. What to do in case of fire or a fire drill should also be discussed, particularly if there are special arrangements required with regard to the children.

As mentioned previously, foremost among parents' concerns is anxiety about the children's reactions to separation and, more generally, about their behaving "properly" in school. Staff can allay worries that a child will not settle in the play room or permit the parent to leave. We usually suggest that the parent calmly leave the area and allow the early childhood teacher to soothe the child and redirect his or her attention. Parents are reassured that they may visit the area any time they wish.

With regard to "proper" behavior, it is worthwhile to reaffirm your positive approach to discipline, so that each parent will fully understand how you will deal with any conflict situation that involves his or her child. It is important to state clearly that no form of physical discipline or negative verbalization will be used under any circumstances. Instead, the discipline style will be to provide clear, positive models of appropriate behavior and to offer the children choices, using praise and assistance to help them solve their social difficulties.

Parents are relieved to hear that "everyone will see everyone else's child misbehave at some time," and staff should say explicitly that they expect and are prepared for tantrums, toileting accidents, and refusals to participate. In a group of 2- and 3-year-olds who have come together for the first time, such behavior is commonplace, but parents are often em-

barrassed by it. With humor, parents can be encouraged to think out loud about situations that evoke a "Thank goodness that's not happening to me" response. Sharing their concerns and uncertainties about being judged as parents will start the process through which group members come to feel comfortable with one another.

The issue of confidentiality also should be introduced early in the first week. Because parents divulge many aspects of their personal lives over the course of the program, all participants must be certain that what they say will be held in confidence by everyone. We introduce this topic by asking parents how they would react to an acquaintance mentioning that he or she had heard about their child having a "bad day." After some discussion, we ask them to consider two rules that promote confidentiality:

1. *Speak positively about one another in the program.*

   The group will become like a family, whose members see one another every day and have to learn to get along, regardless of their differences. This first rule should be directly stated by the adult educator and discussed. Expectations that parents will be patient with one another and the children, share resources in the room, and work together in cooperative learning tasks are highlighted. It also should be stressed that parents who witness bad behavior on the part of someone else's child should not discuss or make judgments about it. The parent in question will be informed by the teacher and will have a chance to discuss it if necessary.

2. *Avoid discussing other students or their children with people outside the program.*

   Obviously, this rule does most to promote confidentiality. During discussion of it, the adult educator should highlight that it also promotes respect for and trust in one another, and that this will ultimately make the group work better as a whole.

During the first few weeks, it also helps to share with parents the program's obligation for accountability and to explain that staff must report on what the program offers to families, how it works, and the level of satisfaction and success that families experience through participation. We have shared with parents our concerns about consistent funding and accounting for the funds we have received. Because visitation to the program can be an asset in fundraising, we sometimes want to allow it, but parents must be consulted and give their permission first. (See Chapter 8 for more on this topic.) Quite naturally, some may object to being observed and to showing their and their children's work. Open discussion of this issue promotes parent ownership of even administrative aspects of the program.

Families Developing Literacy Together

Although most enrolled families have a range of children's literature available at home, in the early days of the program many parents report that they do not engage routinely in shared reading with their children and some do not read at all themselves. Parents frequently offer explanations that focus on their children, who they describe as too distractible, mischievous, or young to be capable of shared reading. The expectation is usually that reading should be a quiet pursuit, and parents often relate frustrating attempts at shared reading that end with threats of calling a "time out" because the child will not sit still.

Even those parents who know the importance of helping young children develop positive reading habits at home tend to share reading infrequently. One married mother of three noted that her youngest child was rarely read to although the older children had enjoyed these early literacy experiences. This mother said that she had liked reading with her older children but there was no time for it when the third child came along. Many busy parents come to see their responsibility for their children's literacy development as one of providing reading materials and encouraging the perception of reading as a solitary activity, used to keep busy or quiet.

In our program, the children are read to each day. Parents take part in discussions about what appeals to the children and how various reading strategies work with them, thereby acquiring more facility with a range of children's literature and ideas for shared reading. Reports of changes in the nature of parent-child shared reading routines and their children's reactions to literature at home are common. For example, one parent stated on entry that she "hated" reading and did not like reading with her child, although her literacy abilities were such that she had no difficulty with the children's books we had available. At the end of the program, this mother reported that she now regularly engaged in shared reading at home because her daughter loved it and initiated it. This parent noted, "It's very important that she grows up with a love for reading."

This mother's focus was still on her child, but we have found that as parents become more familiar with strategies that promote their children's language and thinking skills through shared reading at home, their enjoyment of the activity grows. An excerpt from a parent journal illustrates this:

> Jimmy and I read *Where the Wild Things Are* and he thought it was a real cool book. I think he really enjoyed the pictures of the characters in the book. I also like the pictures in the book. He began reading the book by telling me a story just by looking at the pictures. He even knows the one that looked like a chicken. I like when he reads to me. I know he is using his imagination and makes up his own stories just by simple pictures.

Developing Parenting Skills

On entry to the program many of the adults express frustrations about aspects of parenting. This mother's comments about her 30-month-old daughter are typical:

> I wonder how I can handle Amy's defiant attitude. If I say no, don't touch, she *has* to try again, always with a smirk on her face. Sometimes it makes me so mad I scream at her to stop, and she looks at me like I'm crazy. Sometimes I think this will never end. It really wears me down, and I wonder how much patience I'll have when the next one is born.

For many of these parents, strategies for coping with the demands of young children are restricted to setting limits and calling "time outs," in which isolation is used as a form of discipline. The program's focus on child language development and parent-child activities shows parents an alternative, and they come to see that they can interact with their children in positive ways through play and shared reading, creating more stimulation for these active toddlers.

Once they become comfortable with one another, the parents gradually begin to reflect together on parenting styles. Part of the program involves their sharing experiences in group discussions, reading about effective parenting, and observing the children in school. As one parent noted,

> Reading over my Oct. 12th [journal] entry, I've been noticing a big improvement with myself. I've really been trying to see myself getting angry or frustrated *before* I lose my temper. At the time it's happening I've tried reading or coloring with her. She cheers up if she's whiney and I usually end up laughing over something she's said or done. I guess what I'm doing is turning a negative into a positive experience.

Another parent reported on taking home a play activity she had made in school:

> Rhonda really loved playing with the felt board and the felt animals. We took turns making a story about Old MacDonald's farm. She wanted to do it again before going to sleep.

Another skill developed through the program is time management. After years away from school, many parents find it difficult to adjust to the strain on their schedules created by program participation. Collaboration with parents can help them learn how to plan and to put a priority on finding time to explore aspects of personal development and educational opportunity. Nevertheless, the realities of child rearing must be appreciated, and program staff should be careful to allow in-class time for problem solving and discussion. This issue is illustrated in an excerpt from one parent's journal:

> Sometimes I find it difficult to go to school and then I arrive home when everyone else does (two school-age children). So it's very hectic, then there is supper, help them with their homework, wash, and bed. Then there is finally time for me. I guess my solution would be to not try and do so much. Once I get into a routine I know I'll do okay.... I am thinking when Cindi gets into school I would like to find a job full time. But for now I'd like to get my Grade 12 diploma and I'll work from there.

It is in the first few weeks that the groundwork for successful family experiences in the program is laid. Program staff need to be sensitive to parent apprehensions and concerns, while at the same time preparing a positive environment for learning. Expectations and routines must be clear, and all families must be comfortable with the program and feel that it will meet their individual needs. Parents and children want to feel assured that they are in a safe and secure setting, where they are respected and will be consulted as they begin to explore and develop literacy connections together at home and at school.

Chapter 4

Parents and Children Together: Promoting Positive Interaction

My dishes went unwashed today. I didn't make my bed.
I took his hand and followed, where his eager footsteps led.
Oh yes, we went adventuring, my little child and I,
Exploring all the great outdoors beneath the sun and sky.
We watched a robin feed her young. We climbed a sunlit hill,
Saw cloud-sheep scamper through the sky. We plucked a daffodil.

Author Unknown

At the heart of a successful family literacy program is time devoted to parent-child interaction. For children, literacy emerges through natural communication with adults who share their knowledge and understanding of the world. But through this interaction *both* adults and children can grow in literacy: While the child is encouraged to discover, name, and explain, parents are also challenged to learn

and to adapt their own language and problem-solving skills to support the child's development.

How can program staff and participants structure the family literacy environment so that opportunities abound for positive interaction between parents and children? How can we encourage parents to extend these interactions and try new teaching strategies? In our own program, we drew on our understanding of the way young children learn to establish routines that would enable parents to engage in sustained play and exploration with their children. In order to reinforce these activities in settings outside the program, we also decided to provide class time for parents to discuss and reflect on how they play and interact with their children. It is in the context of such reflection that parents can consider new ideas and strategies to guide and support their children's development. At the same time, through discussion parents receive encouragement from the program staff and the other parents, who support their efforts to try new approaches.

Parent-Child Activities

Every day in our program there are two blocks, circle time and play room time, during which parents and children play together and converse.

Circle Time

Circle time provides a great way for all participants to get to know one another in an atmosphere in which everyone can be successful. The parents see that over time, as the children watch, imitate, and try, they develop language and understanding, learn to make choices and take turns, and develop friendships.

In our program, circle time begins after all participants are settled in the family room. When parents and children first arrive in class each day, they are invited to read together. The children pick up the routine quickly, and it becomes customary for them to choose the books from the classroom library they will share with their parents. After everyone has arrived, parents and children are called to circle time with a welcome song, such as "Here We Are Together" (Warren, 1992). Children then discuss the weather, choosing picture cards that illustrate the day's conditions while parents give hints from their walks or drives to school, or by suggesting that the children look out the window. Songs that feature repetition about the day of the week and the weather follow: "Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Today is _____, today is _____. It is _____ today" (sung to the tune of "My Darling Clementine") and "What's the weather, weather, weather? What's the weather like today? [child volunteers a response] Tyler says it's sunny..." (sung to the tune of "Mama's Little Baby Loves Shortenin' Bread"). Using

props such as a large, laminated calendar and number cards, we count the days of the month and, as a group, we announce the day and the date. Later, when the routine is established, a daily "weather helper" is designated to help lead these activities.

At the beginning of the week, songs and games related to the week's theme are introduced. Games are designed to engage parents and children in one-on-one interaction. Parents guide their children to a solution, assist them with learning new skills, and provide encouragement and praise. For example, during a numbers theme, we introduce a game called "The Spotted Dinosaur." Each parent-child pair receives a picture of a dinosaur and a marker. The child takes a handful of pennies from a bag we pass around the group. Parent and child then count the pennies together and draw that many spots on the dinosaur. Afterward, a number-related song such as "Five Little Monkeys" might be sung. For a theme on shapes, we use masking tape to create large triangles, squares, rectangles, and so forth on the floor. We then sing a variation of "Old MacDonald," suggesting that "on his farm, he had some shapes." When a particular shape is named, parent-child pairs go to and stand on it together, or they find an object of that shape in the room. Later, the children might be asked to lie down on their favorite shape as we sing "See the Sleeping Bunnies."

During the remainder of circle time, children are given the opportunity to choose songs to sing. Each child eagerly awaits his or her turn, so that everyone has the chance to select a favorite. This is a cuddling time, and the children sit on their parents' laps or snuggle beside them. We try to encourage selection of songs that parents and children know and for which they can carry out actions together. For example, in "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," parent and child can hold hands to row and rock back and forth as the tempo changes from slow to fast. The children enjoy singing these songs actively with their parents, and parents report that their children sing them at home. The carryover provides parents with ideas for play and for increasing parent-child interaction away from the classroom. In addition, as parents observe how fast their children learn the songs, how attentive and cooperative they are when singing and playing games, they develop positive images of their children's learning potential. As one parent put it, "I thought my child was shy. I'm happy to see her try things now."

Play Room Time

At the end of the program day, parents and children reunite for approximately 25 minutes of play time. After 2 hours on their own, the children are eager for their parents' attention and for something new to do, and the parents come to this block ready to focus on their children. As the weeks pass, parents begin to observe aspects of their children's cognitive, language, social, and emotional growth, and they take note of the differ-

ent interaction styles and strategies used by group members to support and guide the children's development. Later in the program, parents increasingly use this time to try various ways of engaging their children in play and language and to reflect on their success.

At the start of a new program session, parents are introduced to concepts related to play, based on the work of Greenspan (1990), by means of selected clips from the video *Floor Time: Tuning in to Each Child* (Hanna & Wilford, 1990). The video describes both an attitude toward play and a set of techniques that give the parents ideas for positive ways of being with their children. It promotes an image of parent-child interaction as supportive and encouraging of exploration and identifies five basic play strategies that make sense to parents as ways to enter their child's world:

1. *Observe.*
   Take time to observe the child's mood, interests, and style of play. Is she an "all-action" type of child, or is she more hesitant and shy? Try to match the child's interests as you begin to play with her.
2. *Approach.*
   Join in the child's play slowly, without taking charge or disrupting the ongoing activity. Open a channel of communication that respects her activity.
3. *Follow the child's lead.*
   Become a play partner, but allow the child to direct the action. Respect the child's ideas and allow him to create and pursue his own activities.
4. *Extend and expand play.*
   Make supportive comments about the child's play without being intrusive. Ask questions that help him or her experiment with play materials. Use language that describes what is happening and suggests the main idea of the play. Avoid being critical of what the child is doing. Instead of "No, not that way," try something like "You made all the blocks fall down. Were they a castle?"
5. *Stay on the child's level.*
   Use a calm voice and gestures that convey support and encouragement (nods, smiles). Stay close to the child and try to keep at eye level with him or her.

In addition to running clips from the *Floor Time* video, in the early days of the program we prepare for play room time by asking some questions to generate discussion. Figure 6 on page 44 gives suggestions for guiding this discussion, both before and after the video is shown.

Figure 6 Discussion Guide to Introduce Play Room Time

Before viewing the video

Write the following in large letters on the chalkboard or a large sheet of paper:

Your child is developing the ability to express ideas and feelings and to relate to others.

Now ask the following questions:

1. What ideas do you have about this quote? What comes to your mind when you hear the term *play time*? With a partner, brainstorm all the words or ideas that you can think of. Make an idea web entitled "Play Time."
2. When do you have opportunities for parent-child play time at home? (The adult educator makes a group list on the board or chart paper, based on parents' comments.)

After viewing the video

Ask the following questions:

1. What was one thing from the *Floor Time* video that was important to you?
2. The video shows that Floor Time can be divided into five steps. Working with a partner, how many of the five steps can you recall?
3. How long should a play session be for a preschooler?

Figure 7 Let's Observe: Parents and Children Playing and Talking

Parent Name _____

Observing your own talk

	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
1. I asked questions to encourage my child to talk.			
2. I used names and labels as I played so my child could imitate me.			
3. I used specific words for color, size, and shape.			
4. I described what my child was doing as we played.			
5. I reminded my child of other related experiences when we played.			

Observing your child's talk

My child uses language...	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
1. to request help.			
2. to engage me in play ("You be the...").			
3. to request information ("What...?").			
4. to plan the next activity or tell me how to play.			
5. to label or name something.			
6. to explain an activity or how a toy works.			

After discussing aspects of play, we distribute observation guides to help parents monitor their children's language development (Figure 7) and interact positively with their children during play (Figure 8). If they can, parents take a few minutes at the end of play time to reflect on their interaction with their children and to complete the checklists, or they take time at home that evening or during Parents Together Time the next day to do so. Use of the checklists fades after a few weeks, by which time parents have generally developed relaxed play routines with their children. However, staff at our program have found it helpful to return to the checklists periodically with individual parents who have concerns about maintaining positive interaction with their children during play.

Figure 8 Let's Observe: Parents and Children Interacting

Parent Name _____

During play time, I should remember to...
- show kindness and interest in my child's ideas.
- join in play themes without dominating.
- allow my child to direct the action.
- follow my child's lead by respecting his or her ideas and ability to make decisions.
- look for ways to respond and build on my child's ideas.

For each question, circle the O (often), S (some), or N (never). Then use the blank space to tell something about how you felt about that aspect of your playing together.

1. Do I observe how my child interacts? (For example, did I notice if he or she was quiet? Excited? Does he or she want help? Or does he or she prefer to figure out things alone?)

   O S N

   I felt that _____.

2. Do I approach my child slowly, with respect?

   O S N

   I felt that _____.

3. Do I allow my child to take the lead? Do I follow that lead?

   O S N

   I felt that _____.

4. Do I encourage my child's play by staying involved with his or her play theme and helping him or her to discover new directions?

   O S N

   I felt that _____.

5. Do I use gestures, expressions, and a tone of voice to show I support my child and that I am there?

   O S N

   I felt that _____.

Parents Together Time

Providing opportunities for informal discussion among the parents is key to success throughout our program. During the 2-hour daily PTT segment, learning activities and topics are introduced in such a way as to encourage parents to share their experiences and ideas. Whether the plan for the day involves organizing theme-based craft activities, focusing on parent-child reading and children's literature, or talking about parenting or nutrition, activities are discussed in terms of how parents can best foster their children's development and literacy learning.

One of the first issues for discussion in PTT sessions concerns parent-child interaction as the foundation of literacy development. As already noted, parents' communication with their children contributes in important ways to literacy development. At the outset of the program, we ask parents to focus on aspects of their daily interactions with their children through activities designed to encourage exploration of language development (see Figure 9).

Once the program is well underway, we have found that it is helpful to establish a weekly plan for PTT. Doing so enables parents to anticipate the focus of this program segment each day and to identify personal learning goals for specific activities. Working within a weekly schedule, our program explores a range of issues related to parents' influence on child learning and literacy development. At the same time the plan has allowed opportunities to respond to the adults' interests in developing parenting skills, knowledge about nutrition, and cooking abilities. Wherever possible, we try to maintain enough flexibility to accommodate parent interests and special needs as they arise.

In our schedule, each day has a different focus. Monday is dedicated to devising and creating materials for learning activities that promote parent-child interaction. These activities are pursued throughout the week, but the focus for PTT on Tuesday shifts to family reading, Wednesday to parenting, and Thursday to family nutrition. (Friday is a "catch-up" day when parents can finish activities not completed during the week.) The remainder of this chapter describes aspects of Monday's PTT session—what we call "Make-Try-Take" day. Subsequent chapters address the family reading and parenting segments.

Although Thursday's nutrition component is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the program for all of us, we do not deal with it in detail in this book. Each week, the session follows the curriculum for a Domestic Foods course traditional in our district, combined with practical experiences in food preparation. Over the course of the year parents engage in a variety of cooking activities such as canning and baking, preparing gingerbread houses for Christmas, and creating family meals on a budget, and they learn a range of nutritional concepts. In these sessions,

Figure 9 Teacher's Outline for Introductory PTT Sessions

Helping children develop spoken and written language

Session objectives (to be shared with parents):
- to consider the caregiver's role in the child's language development
- to identify how parent-child conversations support language development
- to identify the range of occasions for parent-child talk
- to relate the concept of parent-child interaction to personal family experiences

Learning activities:

1. Working in pairs, parents discuss the following questions:
   - What do you think is the most important skill that the young child has to learn?
   - How is it that by the age of 5, before they ever go to school, most children know a lot about how to communicate with adults?
   - What has been happening to the child during those 5 years to help him or her learn how to use language?
   - When do parents start talking to their children?
   - How much time do you think you spend talking with your child every day?

   The teacher then guides a whole-group discussion, supporting all parent responses and recording them on the chalkboard or chart paper.

2. Create a concept web with the parents entitled "Children Learn to Speak." From all the responses for the web, identify points such as (a) a child cannot learn language alone, (b) children need the chance to listen to and speak with others, and (c) one of the parents' major roles is to support their children's language learning.

3. Read each of the following excerpts aloud and ask parents to try to suggest what the mother is doing when she talks with her child:

   Mother: Is that good cheese? Nummy cheese? (Speaking to her 13-month-old son.)
   Scott: (Offers mother a piece of cheese.)
   Mother: You eat it. Put it in your mouth.
   Scott: Urrrrg (vocalizes and looks toward the wall).
   Mother: What are you lookin' at?
   Scott: Berrr (vocalizes and looks around the room).
   Mother: Huh?
   Scott: (Reaches toward cheese in his mother's hand.)
   Mother: Want some more cheese? More cheese?

   Amy: Mommy brush. Mommy brush (an 18-month-old looking at a small toothbrush on a table in her room).
   Mother: What? The brush? The toothbrush?
   Amy: Teethbrush.
   Mother: You want to brush your teeth with that?
   Amy: Want to teethbrush.

Possible parent responses shared during discussion:
- This is natural, ordinary talk—not like a teacher talking to students.
- These are ordinary, everyday events.
- Children use language for reasons.
- The mother participates in conversation with the child as an equal partner.
- The child is not clearly understood.
- The mother "fills in" what's missing and expands on the child's response.
- Parent language provides a model for the child
- The child further imitates the parent's model

(continued)

Figure 9 Teacher's Outline for Introductory PTT Sessions (continued)

4. Working with partners, parents make a list of the reasons they think their child uses language. They then list where and when they find opportunities for parent-child conversation, and note the times they feel are not appropriate for talk (this enables parents to express opinions about limits on child-parent interaction).

   Examples of reasons children use language:
   - to obtain food, attention, other "goodies"
   - to avoid unpleasant things
   - to find out about the world and people
   - to share
   - to pretend
   - to play

   Examples of opportunities for parent-child conversation:
   - morning
   - mealtimes
   - bathtime
   - shopping
   - walking
   - bedtime
   - television time
   - anytime

5. To promote thinking about their children's speech development, parents may brainstorm the ways they believe their children are still learning language. The group may be partnered up and each pair assigned one of five age groups: birth to 6 months, 6 to 12 months, 1 year, 2 years, and 3 to 5 years. Pairs jot down how children communicate at their assigned age. In our family room, we display a large poster that accompanies the *Floor Time* video (Hanna & Wilford, 1990) and shows stages of language development from birth through age 5. Parents are able to check out characteristics of language at different ages and compare their own observations of how children communicate. The class then regroups and information is shared. Parents take notes as each pair presents its age group, and everyone is free to add information.

parents work together in the school kitchen and share recipes for favorite dishes and for foods from their various cultures. This aspect of the program solidifies relationships among parents and fosters a sense of cohesion in the group.

Make-Try-Take

Parents Together Time starts each week with Make-Try-Take. The activities created in this strand are then used throughout the rest of the week, as the parents interact with their children during play room time and at home.

An integral part of Make-Try-Take is discussion. When they are considering new activities for the week, parents share ideas that suggest al-

ternative parent-child interaction strategies. During these discussions, we also stress the importance of play in the young child's development and the parents' critical role in encouraging this growth. Later in the week, after parents have tried the activities, we set aside time during PTT when they can discuss their children's success and their ongoing observations of parent-child interactions.

Without a doubt, the key to successful Make-Try-Take time is flexibility. Family literacy practitioners must be prepared to adapt. By all means plan, but be willing to abandon those plans when the opportunity arises to take advantage of new ideas, events, or experiences. As parents come to feel more comfortable and confident in the program, they will want to share experiences, and this will require attention and discussion. Be prepared to move to the background, offering help only when necessary to encourage parents to make decisions, express opinions, and work with one another.

Make-Try-Take Routines

Each Monday during PTT, parents focus on creating four activities for the week, based on a particular theme (see the next subsection); these are completed on Monday through Thursday. One activity is tried with the children later each day during our time together in the play room. For the first month, the adult educator devises the activities and acts as a leader, preparing materials and guiding parents in discussions of how they can be used in play at home as well as in school. Later, a pair of parents will assume this leadership role each week.

To help them direct their work, we distribute a planning guide to each parent at the beginning of the week (see Figure 10 on page 50). Initially, the teacher prepares a written summary of the week's four activities, explaining how they might take shape as group members read through the points on the guide. The last point, which relates to talking with the children, helps parents identify the key learning areas to be addressed and to plan how they will use supportive interaction during the activities.

Throughout the program, these sessions revolve around informal discussion. Parents' ideas are written down so that they may be reviewed before play time. During these discussions, parents expand their own language skills and vocabulary and deepen their understanding of themes and concepts as they go along. They become better able to encourage their children's language development and begin to be able to gauge their children's developmental level. As they share ideas, they discover that problems they face are not exclusive to their own children. Concerns about a shy child, a child who appears easily distracted, or one who is slow to use language are often experienced by other parents, who can offer advice and support. Make-Try-Take time is therefore important for devel-

Figure 10 Parent Planning Guide for Make-Try-Take

Make-Try-Take: *Make* an activity, *try* it and observe/listen to your child, *take* it home for a pleasant experience.

Prepare four activities according to the theme of the week. Think about how you will do each activity with your child:

1. What materials do I need for the activity?
2. What parts will I do?
3. What parts will my child do? Does the activity match my child's level of learning and interest? If it doesn't, how can I change it?
4. Does the activity encourage talking with my child? What questions could I ask that involve more than a yes or no answer? What might I tell my child that would be interesting to him or her? How can I encourage my child to ask me questions? What actions or sounds can we do? How many of our senses can we use?

Helpful hints:

- Find a quiet spot away from others.
- Do not force your child to do the activity. If he or she is tired or wants to show you something else, take the activity home and try it later.
- Let your child do as much as possible by himself or herself.
- Praise your child sincerely and often. Say things like "I love your picture!"
- Ask your child questions that you thought of before you started the activity.
- Be patient. Understanding of routines, attention span, interests, and motor skills will develop. Remember—it is not the final product that is important; it is the process that counts.
- Feel good about yourself and what you are doing.
- Have fun and enjoy your child. He or she is terrific!
- *Most important*: Listen to your child. Encourage him or her to expand comments and answers by asking "thinking" questions (who, what, where, when, why, how).

* * * * *

[Theme Title]

Activity: _____

Importance (e.g., small/large motor skills, counting, visual discrimination, listening, explaining, discussing, describing): _____

_____

Materials: _____

_____

Here's How

Parent:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

With child:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

How this activity can be done at home:

_____

_____

oping friendships and a support network for the parents, who are often isolated at home. The adult educator also gains an opportunity to learn more about parent concerns and becomes better able to offer assistance.

In one of these sessions early in the program, we distribute a reference about children's learning (see Figure 11 on page 52). This guide helps parents organize details of Make-Try-Take and devise or modify activities to target key areas they wish to work on with their children—whether language development and thinking abilities, gross or fine motor skills, social skills, or concepts about time, space, and number. If the activities are not designed with aspects of children's unique learning styles in mind, they can become simple arts and crafts projects. With planning, however, they develop into opportunities for parent-child interaction that focus on learning and literacy development.

Once parents understand the format and feel confident about trying things themselves, they pair up to devise activities for one of the weekly themes. (This is discussed in more detail in the Make-Try-Take Activities section at the end of this chapter.) We have a variety of teacher-made and commercial resources available in the classroom to assist parents in their planning and creating (see Figure 12 on page 53). Parents' use of these references gives them the opportunity to read a range of print for a real purpose. They also are required to prepare "activity guides" that describe each activity and provide space for parents to reflect after it has been tried. This also gives real purpose to reading and writing for the parents. Some examples, which can be used early in the program when the adult educator is still taking the leadership role, appear in Chapter 3 of the companion publication, *Families at School: A Handbook for Parents*. Here, Figure 13 on page 54 shows an activity guide as it might be completed by a parent.

These activity guides also serve another purpose. Once the program is well underway, each Monday's PTT session begins with an evaluation of the previous week's activities. Parents informally rank the activities they have used, with 1 representing the activity most enjoyed by their child that week and 4 the least enjoyed. There is also space on the activity guide for them to record their observations and provide a reason for the ranking, which may be as individual as "She was tired and cranky and didn't want to do anything."

We have found that ranking the activities gives parents insight into their children's thinking. If they judge that an activity was not developmentally appropriate, the group discusses how it might be changed to match particular children's levels. Often parents will then retry the activity at home. This review is also an opportunity for sh..ing ideas about the types of activities that the children enjoy, and helps parents learn to create their own activities.

Figure 11 Parent Guide to Children's Learning

Children learn language by...

imitating sounds
singing songs
making rhymes
asking and answering questions
listening
explaining
doing finger plays
pretending
explaining their ideas
describing things
comparing things
telling stories
sharing books
labeling
following directions
describing patterns
playing make-believe

Children learn about math, space, and time by...

sorting things
talking about the time of day
putting things in order
counting
grouping things
drawing and labeling shapes
talking about more and less
matching things
making patterns
creating charts and graphs
talking about above and below, under and over, on top of, underneath, and beside
recognizing numbers
doing puzzles

Children develop fine motor skills by...

gluing
lacing
drawing
tracing
cutting
stacking
tearing
sewing

Children develop gross motor skills by...

jumping
running
twisting
climbing
walking
throwing and catching
skipping
balancing
bending
bouncing a ball

Children learn social skills by...

sharing
taking turns
pretending together
talking together
cooperating
helping one another
expressing their feelings

Children develop thinking skills by...

completing patterns
pretending
using their senses
playing memory games
doing puzzles
sorting things
noting similarities and differences
dramatizing
answering "what if" questions

Make-Try-Take Themes

A listing of suggested themes for Make-Try-Take activities appears in Figure 14 on page 55. Parents in our program have found activities structured around these themes interesting to create and fun to try with their children at school and at home. Besides using our own imaginations and

Figure 12 Resources for Circle Time and Make-Try-Take

Bennett, S., & Bennett, R. (1991). *365 TV-free activities you can do with your child.* Holbrook, MA: Bob Adams.

Clancy, L. (1991). *Preschool teacher's month by month activities program.* West Nyack, NY: Center for Applied Research in Education.

Claycomb, P. (1992). *The busy classroom.* Mt. Rainier, MD: Gryphon House.

Croft, D. (1990). *Activities handbook for teachers of young children* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Forte, I. (1988). *The early childhood teacher's every-day-all-year-long book of units, activities, and patterns.* Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications.

Frank, M. (1976). *I can make a rainbow.* Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications.

Galloway, L., Ivey, G., & Valster, R. (1990). *Daily plans for active preschoolers.* West Nyack, NY: Center for Applied Research in Education.

Green, M. (1995). *Teaching from cupboards and closets.* Glenview, IL: Goodyear.

Greenspan, S. (1990). How emotional development relates to learning. In S. Hanna & S. Wilford, *Floor time: Tuning in to each child* (Video and guide). New York: Scholastic.

Hanna, S., & Wilford, S. (1990). *Floor time: Tuning in to each child* (Video and guide). New York: Scholastic.

Herr, J., & Libby, Y. (1990). *Designing creative materials for young children.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Kohl, M.F. (1985). *Scribble cookies and other independent creative art experiences for children.* Bellingham, WA: Bright Ring.

Mailbox Magazine—Preschool. Greensboro, NC: Educational Center.

Warren, J. (1985). *1•2•3 Art.* Everett, WA: Totline.

Warren, J. (1989). *Theme-a-saurus.* Everett, WA: Totline.

Warren, J. (1991). *Alphabet theme-a-saurus.* Everett, WA: Totline.

Warren, J. (1992). *Piggyback songs for school.* Everett, WA: Totline.

Wilmes, L., & Wilmes, D. (1990). *Make-take games.* Elgin, IL: Building Blocks.

Wilmes, L., & Wilmes, D. (1992). *More everyday circle times.* Elgin, IL: Building Blocks.

ideas contributed by the program's participants, we referred to some of the resources listed in Figure 12 to help us develop these themes. Of course, themes will be different in different programs, according to the individual needs of participants and the context in which the program takes place.

In determining the order in which themes are introduced, we have been guided by a desire to introduce basic readiness concepts and simple activities that highlight a balance of social, cognitive, language, and gross and fine motor skills early in the program. As the program gets underway, themes focus on concepts of number, color, shape, body awareness and self, and emergent writing, all of which are reinforced in activities in later themes.

Our program is divided into two semesters and we are therefore able to repeat some of the themes, depending on the proportion of families who continue into the second term. Themes such as "Me, Myself, and I" warrant repetition when more than half the participants are new to the program. For the parents who have continued from the first term, work-

ing within these themes is not viewed as repetition because new activities can be tried (or old ones extended) and a leadership role can be assumed the second time around. We have found that parents take an interest in modeling routines for new participants.

Once everyone is comfortable with the Make-Try-Take routines and the adult educator has led the group through 2 or 3 weeks of themes and activities, parents are ready to take over. Pairs are invited to select one of the themes outlined in Figure 14 (or to suggest a theme of their own). They are then responsible for devising the four activities that will be undertaken during that theme's week.

Figure 13 Example of a Make-Try-Take Activity Guide

Me, Myself, and I

My hands and feet

Materials: large sheet of paper (any color), marker, crayon, pencil, or pen

Here's How

Parent:
Draw a line down the center of the paper.
At the top of one section print, "[My child's name] hands and feet." In the other section print "Mom's [or Dad's] hands and feet."

With child:
Either you or your child trace the hands and feet onto the paper.

Talking with my child:
We talked about how Molly's feet are small, but Mommies have big feet.

At home:
Molly loved doing this, and kept asking to draw feet.

Rank (from 1 to 4): 1

Why?
We both enjoyed doing this. It was easy but fun. I think it helped Molly with big and small.

Figure 14 Theme Planner

Month	Theme
Term 1	
September	My, Myself, and I
	School Fun
	Spectacular Senses
	Opposites
October	I Love Fall
	Harvest Time at the Farm
	Shape and Color
	Halloween
November	ABCs and 123s
	My Family
	Community Helpers
	Nursery Rhymes
December	Imagination Zone
	Winter Wonderland
	Happy Holidays!
January	Furry Friends
	Sports Spectacular
	Day and Night
Term 2	
February	Me, Myself, and I (repeat) or Take a Holiday
	Valentine's Day
	ABCs and 123s
	Color and Shape
March	My Family
	Imagination Zone
	Circus Time
April	Baby Animals at the Farm
	Community Helpers (repeat) or Transportation
	Under the Sea
May	Sensational Spring
	Green and Growing
	Incredible Insects
June	A Camping We Will Go
	Jungle Giants
	Summer Sizzler

Make-Try-Take Activities

Parents take the lead. Assuming responsibility for a week's Make-Try-Take activities involves devising the activities, preparing for group distribution a written summary of them and accompanying activity guides, identifying and assembling any materials that will be needed for each activity, and leading discussions. Supported with resources, an in-class store of materials, and teacher guidance, the pairs of parents brainstorm ideas, look through class reference books, suggest alternate resources, create or

choose activities, and prepare the materials they will need when they introduce their theme to the group.

As they work, the teacher ensures that the parents keep in mind what they know about children's learning, drawing their attention back to the categories and activities described in Figure 11. Parents develop the strategy of using these concepts in simple activities, which they gradually expand for the more complex themes (for example, Imagination Zone or Under the Sea) covered late in the term. Setting up activities for these later themes also requires more reading and creative problem solving. But once parents are familiar with the basic elements of planning for a balance of learning experiences, they are eager to put their creative energies to the task.

A week prior to their presentation, parent pairs prepare a rough draft of activities for discussion with the teacher. At this time, they review the activities together, and the teacher helps the parents focus their thinking on the learning the activities may foster in children, making suggestions as necessary to expand the range of learning categories touched on. This is also a time to work on grammar, spelling, and organization of the activities' written materials. In our program, we are fortunate to have access to computers and a volunteer computer tutor, and some parents have enjoyed completing final drafts of their activity summaries and guides on the computer. For those who are reluctant, the teacher is able to produce word-processed copies from the final handwritten materials the parents provide.

Up to this point in the Make-Try-Take routine, parents have had the opportunity to work together with one other person. In the week they present their theme, this cooperation is extended to the whole class. Although one pair continues to lead discussions and supervise preparation of materials, class time is allotted so that all the parents can work together to get things ready for play room time. Now parents can share ideas about creating activities, give one another positive feedback, and encourage cooperation. In our experience, this is one of parents' favorite parts of the program, as they often recall that they loved making crafts in their early years of school and remark on how relaxing this time is for them. In fact, we have found that many enjoy this "work" so much that they choose to continue with it at home.

We have paints, markers, paper, toys, and space to work available in the family room, but we set aside some of our budget each term to cover reasonable expenses for additional craft items the parents might need (for example, Styrofoam balls, ribbon, or felt). Our fundraising efforts continue throughout the year so that we can make such materials available (and maintain and add to our supply of children's literature).

A few points should be noted. We stress simplicity. Activities should involve everyday materials or inexpensive items that require little prepa-

ration. Because parents will increasingly use or adapt these activities at home, it is also a good idea to suggest that they contain materials commonly found around the house. The end product does not have to be pretty; it is most important that the activity be fun and foster positive parent-child communication. Numerous examples of activities that have been used successfully in our program are included in Chapter 3 of the companion parent handbook.

Activities in action. With assistance from co-op students from the secondary school, who work under the supervision of the preschool teacher, the responsible parent pair and the adult educator ensure that activity materials are ready in the play room for the last 25 to 30 minutes of each program session. Each parent and child find a secluded, comfortable place to enjoy the activity together. Both the preschool and adult educators circulate, moving from pair to pair to facilitate interaction. They help the children to ask questions, praise children and parents, and encourage both to expand the activity. This is a busy time, as the children and parents experiment and discover. Most important, it is a time in the program day consistently set aside for positive, loving interaction between parent and child. Positive reinforcement and praise for the children's efforts keep the setting happy, even at the end of a busy day.

In the beginning of the program, parents may chat with one another during play time. This may become an issue that needs to be addressed, particularly if it becomes disruptive or leaves some children to play by themselves. Because of the integrated nature of the program segments, issues such as these can be discussed promptly during PTT the next day.

It is inevitable that some activities will not span the allotted 20 minutes or that a few children will simply not be interested in them. This, too, can be the focus of discussion in the next day's PTT session, when strategies for engaging children and focusing their attention can be explored. Sometimes, of course, it is simply not possible to engage a toddler who does not want to be engaged. For these times, we have extra "back-up" activity cards available in the play room. When a Make-Try-Take activity is not successful with a particular child on a particular day—and children should never be forced to undertake these activities—the parent and child together may choose a card and try that activity. Sample activities appear in Figure 15 on page 58. Parents then note the activity they chose and report on it the following Monday when the preceding week's Make-Try-Take activities are reviewed.

Make-Try-Take activities lend themselves to being taken home and played with over and over again. Parents and children expand them and invent variations that include things of personal relevance. Other family members are often involved in these home activities. Parents enjoy adapting the activities for their older and younger children, who love to participate in what becomes a whole-family undertaking and an opportuni-

Figure 15 "Just in Case": A Card File of Alternate Activities for Play Room Time

I Wrote a Letter to....

Engage your child in writing a letter to a friend or family member. Ask your child what he or she would like written down. Have your child write some parts (or scribble), and/or draw a picture. Read the letter to your child after it is written. Address an envelope while discussing the different parts of the address.

Story Time

Read a familiar story to your child. Ask your child to recall what happens in the story and try to prompt his or her reactions to the characters and events. What do the characters do? What did you think of _____ ?

Wash Up

Show your child how to wash and dry his or her hands. Follow the pictures on the poster beside the sink. Ask your child why it is important to wash his or her hands before eating and after going to the bathroom.

Big and Small

Walk with your child around the classroom. Ask him or her to find things that are bigger and smaller than he or she is.

The Direction Game

Begin with one direction, then two, then three. For example, "Rub your tummy" followed by "Jump once, and then touch your toes" followed by "Pat your head, laugh, and then nod yes."

Rhyme Time

Create sentences for your child to finish with a rhyming word. For example, "My name is Pat. I have a pet ____."

Sorting and Counting

Put five of one item and six of another item (e.g., crayons, blocks, toy cars) in front of your child. Now mix them up. Have your child sort the items and then count them. Ask your child, "Which group has more? Less? How can we make them have the same amount?"

ty for family learning. As parents and children spend this fun time with one another, increased interaction supported by language adds to a positive home environment. The Make-Try-Take activities accumulate at home, creating a library of learning games that the children use to engage their parents more often.

An important part of Make-Try-Take activities is the experience of success they offer to both parent and child. Children enjoy the activities and develop through them. And parents, as they become more comfortable with the activities, learn more about their children and come to enjoy creating opportunities for positive play and interaction with them.

Chapter 5

Core Activities for Family Reading Time

In a school-based family literacy program that has adult literacy development as one of its goals, what sort of activities can be used to promote learning while enhancing self-esteem? We have found that activities that emphasize parents' roles as literacy models and teachers of their children provide strong opportunities for the adults to develop their own confidence and enjoyment in school-like literacy tasks. And by tapping into parents' aspirations for their children's futures and their desire to support their children's literacy development, we maintain the focus on strategies for positive parent-child interaction described in the previous chapter.

This chapter describes teaching routines and parent literacy activities developed for Family Reading, the second of our four program

strands and the focus of Tuesday's PTT session each week. Here parents learn strategies for shared reading with their children, discuss children's literature, and reflect on family reading through discussion and writing. This is a very hands-on chapter, full of actual lesson plans and activities we have used successfully in our program. (For a complete picture of how this strand works, the following should be read in conjunction with Chapter 4 of the companion parent handbook.)

Before moving into discussion of Family Reading itself, it should be noted that when adult learners participate in a program for academic credit, we have found that they expect to be given assignments on which they will be evaluated. For the adults, much of the enjoyment they experience over the course of the program seems to come from the satisfaction of "doing real school work"—taking notes in class, for example, and organizing for assignments completed on time. The sense of pride and confidence they experience in their academic accomplishments is a significant part of building positive attitudes toward literacy, and these attitudes support future literacy development for both parents and children. We note this because these observations gave us confidence to set explicit course expectations in terms of homework assignments and exams, without feeling that we were jeopardizing the informal, supportive atmosphere of the program.

Introductory Activities

In the first weeks of the program, we introduce Family Reading in Parents Together Time with a discussion of the importance of shared reading in children's literacy development. Initial activities are designed to foster a sense of parent ownership of the program and to create a supportive atmosphere by encouraging parents to discuss their own home literacy and their childhood memories. Many will describe the stress they experience about reading with their children, and it is important that they know they can express concerns about home realities without fear of disapproval but with the expectation of support and acceptance. The adult educator must set the tone early in the program, by readily recognizing the reality of the exhausting difficulties faced by most of the program participants. It is no wonder that the adults in the program, many of whom are single parents of more than one child, find it hard to make time for family reading. Only when they are confident of the program's foundation of acceptance will parents become willing to take risks and try new activities and strategies for interaction with their children.

Family Reading and Childhood Reading Memories: A Warm-Up Activity

With this activity, we give parents the opportunity to share their ex-

pectations for reading at home with their children, to relate any childhood memories they have of reading to those expectations, and to discuss home literacy experiences and concerns in an atmosphere of acceptance and support.

The activity usually takes the shape of an informal discussion. At this early stage in the program, however, parents will usually prefer to have some specific direction. We identify some topics to explore before the discussion is to take place. Often, parents are invited to "get the ball rolling" by interviewing each other prior to a large-group discussion. The group may choose to develop a set of interview questions, recorded on chart paper or the chalkboard, before pairing up.

It is important to encourage parents to discuss childhood experiences and feelings, both positive and negative, and to be supportive about these expressions. In the group discussion, the adult educator acts as the facilitator to record parent responses. These "getting to know you" activities stimulate a discussion about the importance of family reading for literacy development.

A Video Introduction to Family Reading

In this introductory activity, we show a videotape entitled *Read to Me! Sharing Books With Young Children* (Sharp & Lazareck, 1991), one of several videos available that describe family reading strategies. During the postviewing discussion, the adult educator prompts parents' responses by asking questions such as these:

- What do you see as the benefits of reading time together? What about the downside?
- Did you notice times in the video when a child reached out to a parent or snuggled closer? Does your child do something like that sometimes? When? What are your feelings when you are reading to your child?
- Are there other kinds of reading materials—besides books—that parents can read aloud with their children?
- Why is it hard some days to find time to read with our children? Can we change this somehow?
- Of all the things you like to do with your child, how do you rate reading?

As the parents respond, the teacher records the comments on the board or chart paper. When the discussion winds down, parents are asked to use this recording to take some notes that summarize the discussion.

At the end of the session, the adult educator distributes copies of the "Reading With Young Children" checklist (Figure 16 on page 62), which

we adapted from material in the viewing guide that accompanies the *Read to Me!* video. Parents are asked to complete it at home for discussion in the Family Reading segment of PTT the following week.

Figure 16 Reading With Young Children

Name: _____ Date: _____

Check your opinion

1. Young children get bored if they hear the same story again and again.
   ___ Agree ___ Disagree
2. It is best to save reading to children until they know how to sit and listen quietly to a story.
   ___ Agree ___ Disagree
3. I would describe my child's feelings about reading as
   ___ No interest ___ A little interest ___ Likes it ___ Loves it

Things that can happen while I am reading to my child (circle 1 for never, 2 for sometimes, and 3 for always)

4. I talk about different parts of the book (cover, "About the Author" page, title, etc.).
   1 2 3
5. I ask questions or make comments about the story to keep his or her attention.
   1 2 3
6. I encourage my child to join in to talk about the pictures.
   1 2 3
7. My child does not pay attention when I read to him or her, so I don't usually bother to finish the story.
   1 2 3
8. I tell my child my own feelings about a story we have read.
   1 2 3
9. I let my child choose the book we'll read.
   1 2 3
10. I let my child hold the book and turn pages.
    1 2 3
11. I praise my child for spending time reading together.
    1 2 3
12. We take turns reading the book.
    1 2 3
13. I act out the story, use different voices for different characters, or make sound effects.
    1 2 3
14. I keep reading, even after my child loses interest.
    1 2 3
15. I point to pictures, label the pictures, and encourage a response.
    1 2 3

Family Reading Routines

The structure of PTT on Family Reading day is adapted from the format Goldsmith and Handel (1990) recommend for family reading workshops. In each session, a particular genre is introduced through two pieces of children's literature, and a specific reading strategy is explained and practiced. Each session involves nine steps:

- *Step 1: Teacher read-aloud (preschool book)*
  The adult educator identifies the genre and asks the parents to think about what makes the book this type of children's literature as they listen to the story.
- *Step 2: Postreading discussion*
  After reading aloud, the teacher elicits from the parents any background knowledge that they may have of the genre, gained either from childhood or from reading to their own children. Using questioning, the teacher then opens a discussion with students about the characteristics of the genre. Parents' comments are written on the chalkboard and any special vocabulary is noted and explained. Parents will be reading the book with their children at a later stage, and vocabulary study will help them develop fluency and confidence to do so. The adult educator should also write some vocabulary words—either from the book itself or concerned with its genre—on the board before each session and ask parents to use context to guess what the words might mean. Parents take notes of this session based on all the information the teacher records.
- *Step 3: Second reading ("reading circle")*
  Taking turns, each parent reads a portion of the book, tells the story from the pictures on a page, or passes it on. (It is important to identify and support this last option so low-skill readers will feel comfortable if they choose to observe the strategies others use to tell a "book story" rather than reading or telling themselves.) This reading allows parents to gain more practice and familiarity with the book before they engage in reading with their children.
- *Step 4: Introduction and modeling of the reading strategy*
  The teacher describes the purpose of the selected reading strategy (or, in some cases, strategies) and how to use it to help children get the most out of a book. He or she then models the strategy, using a portion of the book.
- *Step 5: Paired reading*
  Parents work in pairs to role-play an adult-child reading ex-

perience. The "adult" reads the first half of the story to the "child" using the strategy; the parents switch roles for the second half. Pairs are asked to make notes on what they did.

- *Step 6: Follow-up discussion*
  Time is provided for a discussion of the preceding sessions. Parents raise issues concerning the strategy and connect the story, in whole or part, to other stories or to home situations. This discussion also addresses any problems that parents can foresee with the book or the reading strategy.
- *Step 7: Teacher read-aloud (elementary-level book)*
  This step follows the same format as step 1, using a different book.
- *Step 8: Second reading*
  Using the second book, the group undertakes the reading circle as described in step 3. Following the reading circle, parents discuss how they would use the reading strategy with this book.
- *Step 9: Take-home sheets*
  In addition to home copies for parents of the preschool book discussed each week, parents receive a list of books of that genre that are available from the class or local public library. They read their selected preschool book to their children at home, using the reading strategy they have practiced. The teacher distributes a handout on which parents can record their children's reactions. (An example is given in Figure 17; others appear in the parent handbook that complements this guide.) These are returned on the next Family Reading day, when the teacher and parents spend a short time discussing the previous week's home reading experiences. The handouts are retained for use later in the term, when parents create "memory scrapbooks" for their children.

In Goldsmith and Handel's (1990) model, one reading focuses on a children's book while the second features an adult title. In our program, the first book is a selection for preschoolers, while the second is geared to children in the early elementary grades. Parents in our program have expressed interest in using a second children's book, often because they have older school-age children or wish to become more knowledgeable about and familiar with a range of literature for young readers. One of the great strengths of this model is that it allows repeated reading practice. By using two children's books, we gain the added benefit of ensuring that low-literate adults will be able to participate fully in this reading segment of the program.

Figure 17 Example of a Family Reading Take-Home Sheet

Dramatizing and Making Predications With Predictable Books

Today in class we read *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Paul Galdone and *Jim and the Beanstalk* by Raymond Briggs. We practiced dramatizing the stories and making predictions.

At home, you and I read _____.

These are the actions that we came up with when we were reading:

_____

_____

_____

_____

We also guessed what would happen next at different parts of the story:
Guess (what was the guess, who made it, what page)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

With its two books and nine steps, Family Reading can be a busy session. We recommend that program staff not let the routines take over at the expense of meaningful discussion and enjoyment of reading. It helps to be clear about expectations. For example, in our program we give periodic exams that touch on knowledge of children's literature and techniques for shared reading (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion), so we emphasize the importance of notetaking to parents in this context. It also helps to be well organized. The use of something as simple as "in" and "out" boxes where parents can hand in their take-home sheets each week and pick up any materials the teacher has commented on or graded can help keep activities moving smoothly and efficiently. This will also help parents develop their own organizational skills. Finally, after each session, we recommend that you reflect on what went well and on the reactions of the parents, and solicit their suggestions for improvement. This will help you become more attuned to parent needs and give you ideas for modifications that will better suit your own program.

Over the course of Family Reading, nine genres are discussed together with strategies to promote reading comprehension:

- Predictable books—dramatizing, making predictions
- Once upon a time—asking questions, making predictions
- Folk tales and fables—using picture clues, making predictions
- Wordless picture books—creating a story using picture clues
- Concept books—observing and naming objects
- Family stories—relating reading to personal experience
- Poetry—rereading
- Information books—learning new information
- Newspapers—using pictures to classify information

Examples of additional children's literature in these categories are given in Figure 18. Other recommended resources on family reading include Taylor and Strickland (1986) and Collins (1992).

The next section summarizes lesson plans for Family Reading sessions on using reading strategies with selected genres of children's literature.

Sample Lessons

Following are actual lesson plans we have used successfully in our program. These are used in conjunction with the take-home sheets illustrated in Figure 17 and found in detail in Chapter 4 of *Families at School: A Handbook for Parents.*

Predictable Books

Preschool: *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* by Paul Galdone
Elementary: *Jim and the Beanstalk* by Raymond Briggs
Reading strategies: dramatizing, making predictions

Discussion about the genre. Introduce the term *predictable book* and describe some of the attributes of the genre. Ask parents to contribute ideas, as appropriate, to generate a list that includes elements such as these:

- Words, phrases, or sentence patterns are repeated.
- Patterns are repetitive or cumulative (as in "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" or "This Is the House That Jack Built").
- Rhyming patterns and rhythm are present ("This old man, he played one...").
- Familiar sequences or concepts such as days of the week, numbers, colors, and shapes are often included.
- Story events are predictable or repeated ("Then Goldilocks sat in the middle-sized chair...").

Figure 18 Books Recommended for Family Reading Day

Predictable Books

Briggs, R. (1997). *Jim and the beanstalk*. New York: Putnam.
Carlstrom, N.W. (1986). *Jesse bear, what will you wear?* New York: Macmillan.
Galdone, P. (1981). *The three billy goats gruff*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
Keats, E.J. (1971). *Over in the meadow*. New York: Scholastic.
Martin, B. Jr. (1992). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Holt, Rinehart.
Robart, R. (1986). *The cake that Mack ate*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
Rosen, M. (1990). *We're going on a bear hunt*. New York: Scholastic.

Once Upon a Time Books

Archambault, J., & Martin, B. Jr. (1994). *A beautiful feast for big king cat*. New York: HarperCollins.
Berger, B.H. (1996). *Grandfather Twilight*. New York: Putnam.
Freeman, D. (1968). *A pocket for Corduroy*. New York: Viking.
Hayes, S. (1989). *This is the bear*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
McPhail, D. (1972). *The bear's toothache*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
Sendak, M. (1988). *Where the wild things are*. New York: HarperCollins.
Wood, D., & Wood, A. (1989). *The little mouse, the red ripe strawberry and the big hungry bear*. Auburn, ME: Child's Play.

Folk Tales and Fables

Galdone, P. (1975). *The ginderbread boy*. New York: Clarion.
Galdone, P. (1979). *The three little pigs*. New York: Clarion.
Galdone, P. (1984). *The elves and the shoemaker*. New York: Clarion.
Galdone, P. (1985). *The three bears*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
Mollel, T.M., & Spurll, B. (1992). *Rhinos for lunch and elephants for supper! A Maasai tale*. New York: Clarion.

Wordless Picture Books

Briggs, R. (1978). *The snowman*. New York: Random House.
Day, A. (1985). *Good dog, Carl*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Felix, M. (1995). *The story of a little mouse trapped in a book*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.
Hutchins, P. (1968). *Rosie's walk*. New York: Macmillan.
Mayer, M. (1974). *Frog goes to dinner*. New York: Dial.
Turkle, B. (1976). *Deep in the forest*. New York: Dutton.

Concept Books

Hoban, T. (1985). *Is it larger? Is it smaller?* New York: Greenwillow.
Hoberman, M.A. (1985). *A house is a house for me*. New York: Scholastic.
Martin, B. Jr. (1989). *Chicka chicka boom boom*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
McMillan, B. (1988). *Growing colors*. New York: Lothrop.
Rius, M., Parramon, J.M., & Puig, J.J. (1985). *Hearing* (the Five Senses series). New York: Barrons.
Rius, M., Parramon, J.M., & Puig, J.J. (1985). *Touch* (the Five Senses series). New York: Barrons.
Rius, M., Puig, J.J., & Parramon, J.M. (1985). *Sight* (the Five Senses series). New York: Barrons.
Rius, M., Puig, J.J., & Parramon, J.M. (1985). *Smell* (the Five Senses series). New York: Barrons.
Rius, M., Puig, J.J., & Parramon, J.M. (1985). *Taste* (the Five Senses series). New York: Barrons.
Serfozo, M. (1988). *Who said red?* New York: McElderry.

(continued)

Figure 18 Books Recommended for Family Reading Day (continued)

Family Stories

Berenstain, S., & Berenstain, J. The Berenstain Bears series. New York: Random House.
Bourgeois, P., & Clark, B. The Franklin series. New York: Scholastic.
Gilman, P. The Jillian Jiggs series. New York: Scholastic.
Maccarone, G. (1992). *Itchy, itchy chicken pox*. New York: Scholastic.
Murphy, J. (1986). *Five minutes' peace*. New York: Putnam.
Slier, D. (1985). *What do toddlers do?* New York: Random House.
Wells, R. (1995). *Edward's overwhelming overnight*. New York: Dial.

Poetry

Brown, M. (1987). *Play rhymes*. New York: Dutton.
dePaola, T. (1985). *Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose*. New York: Putnam.
Katz, M.J. (1990). *Ten potatoes in a pot: And other counting rhymes*. New York: HarperCollins.
Lee, D. (1987). *Alligator pie*. Toronto, ON: Gage.
Robinson, F. (Compiler). (1993). *A frog inside my hat: A first book of poems*. New York: Troll.
Sendak, M. (1962). *Chicken soup with rice*. New York: Harper & Row.
Seuss, Dr. (1971). *The lorax*. New York: Random House.

Information Books

Asch, F. (1985). *Bear shadow*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Branley, F. (1986). *Air is all around you*. New York: Crowell.
Carle, E. (1984). *The very hungry caterpillar*. New York: Putnam.
Carle, E. (1989). *The very busy spider*. New York: Philomel.
Heller, R. (1981). *Chickens aren't the only ones*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
Oppenheim, J., & Reid, B. (1990). *Have you seen birds?* New York: Scholastic.
Simon, N. (1986). *Cats do, dogs don't*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman.

After reading the book aloud, continue the discussion by asking parents to give reasons predictable books are so popular with young children, prompting where necessary to obtain some of the following responses:

- Predictable books are written simply and easy to understand.
- Repetition encourages children to "chime in" and get involved with the story.
- Repetition leads quickly to familiarity with the text, so children begin to memorize it.
- Predictable books are simple but involve more than word recognition—they tell a story.
- For children, shared reading is like listening and, because they have been doing this for years, they are expert at imitating rhythm and patterns such as "I'll huff and I'll puff..." and "What big ears you have...."

Discussion about the reading strategy: Dramatizing. Why is it better to read with enthusiasm and action rather than just reading words? Suggest that parents can encourage their children to focus their attention and become involved in the shared reading by joining in on actions or repeating words and phrases in "dramatic" voices. Offer some of these possibilities for dramatic reading: For *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, clap one hand on your lap to make the "trip-trap" sound or use a high voice for the littlest billy goat, a "normal" voice for the medium goat, a deep voice for the biggest goat, and a gruff voice for the troll; for *Jim and the Beanstalk*, make climbing motions when reading about Jim going up the beanstalk.

Discussion about the reading strategy: Making predictions. Why should we ask questions about what might happen when we are reading with our children?

- The child learns that she or he has ideas about the story.
- It helps the child to focus his or her attention.
- The child learns to relate familiar experience to the story.

Emphasize that different people ask different questions and suggest different possibilities for upcoming events. There are no wrong answers.

Once Upon a Time...

Preschool: *Grandfather Twilight* by Barbara Helen Berger
Elementary: *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak
Reading strategies: asking questions, making predictions

Discussion about the genre. Solicit answers to the following questions about *Grandfather Twilight*:

- What "once upon a time" stories do you remember from your own childhood?
- What do you think of when you hear the phrase "the power of imagination"?
- In the "olden days," what was the origin of many stories?
- Why did people create myths to explain things like thunder and fire?

Ask these questions about *Where the Wild Things Are*:

- What do children do to express their imaginations (draw, create an imaginary friend, dress up, role-play, etc.)?
- Did you grow up with imaginary people (such as Santa Claus or the tooth fairy)? When did you stop believing in them? How do you talk to your children about them?

- Do you ever daydream? About what? What feelings do your daydreams evoke in you?
- Is imagination important to you? How do you use your imagination differently than your child uses his or hers?

Close the discussion by exploring how these books are written and illustrated to capture a child's imagination; point out such things as their colorful pictures, fantastic elements, and made-up words.

Discussion about the reading strategies. The questioning strategy expands on making predictions, discussed in the lesson plan for predictable stories. Besides asking their children what might happen next in the story, parents may ask questions about what has already happened. Questions also go beyond the book to solicit the child's opinion (Did you like...? What would you do?). This allows parents to evaluate how the children are understanding the text and how they relate it to their own experiences. In addition, asking questions during reading helps the reader and listener focus attention and get more involved in the story.

Raise these points in the context of a discussion about how the making-predictions strategy worked in practice the previous week. Tell students about the five Ws (who, what, where, when, why) and H (how) to use as question starters. Suggest that when they read "once upon a time" stories at home with their children, they try asking a variety of questions, both to review and to predict. Remind them that there are no wrong answers.

Folk Tales and Fables

Preschool: *The Three Bears* by Paul Galdone

Elementary: *Rhinos for Lunch and Elephants for Supper!* by Tololwa M. Mollel and Barbara Spurll

Reading strategy: using picture cues, making predictions

Discussion about the genre. Ask parents how some folk tales and fables are like the books already discussed. Note that many contain repetition and rhyme (like predictable books) and imaginative elements (like "once upon a time" books). Highlight that these stories have a plot, with a problem to be solved and characters who tend to be either "good guys" or "bad guys." The plot and characters are sometimes magical. There is usually a moral or lesson to be learned (in fables, this is usually expressed in one sentence at the end), and values are often taught. From these stories, children can learn that good triumphs over evil, and that honesty, work, and quick thinking win out over dishonesty, force, and greed.

Discussion about the reading strategy. For young children, reading very much involves beginning to think about a story from pictures. Re-

assure parents that it is all right for their children to tell the story from the pictures. In fact, parents guide their children's developing understanding of story by helping them talk about the pictures as they move from page to page. Suggest that parents ask their children questions such as "What do you see in this picture? What is happening?" or "What is Goldilocks doing here? How do you think the little bear feels?" to encourage them to observe the pictures. Explain how drawing this sort of attention to the pictures can help children understand the plot, characters, and message of the story. Again, encourage questions that go beyond the book and tap into the child's personal associations with the story.

Wordless Picture Books

(Note that this genre should be introduced *after* parents have had a chance to recall familiar stories and are comfortable about engaging in storytelling.)

Preschool: *The Story of a Little Mouse Trapped in a Book* by Monique Felix
Elementary: *The Angel and the Soldier Boy* by Peter Collington
Reading strategy: creating a story using picture cues

Discussion about the genre. Bring in a family snapshot or a newspaper or magazine photo and ask parents to suggest what the story behind the image might be. Open a discussion about how seeing pictures, without attached words, allows the viewer to use his or her imagination and can heighten an emotional response. In a similar way, wordless picture books enable children to concentrate on the story and what it means, rather than being sidetracked by a rigid focus on printed words and what the story "says." For the young child, one major step in literacy acquisition is learning that a story has a beginning, middle, and end. Wordless books help children learn this structure by gaining information from pictures.

Discussion about the reading strategy. Suggest that parents use the pictures to guide their creation of a story to tell their children. Parents should try to tell their stories in sentences. Remind them to ask questions as they go along: What's going on here? How does the mouse in the story feel? Where is he now? What might happen next? This questioning helps to create the story. Recommend that parents mix reality with fantasy. Could the story be a dream?

Concept Books

Preschool: *Who Said Red?* by Mary Serfozo
Elementary: *A House Is a House for Me* by Mary Ann Hoberman
Reading strategy: observing and naming objects

Discussion about the genre. What we term "concept books" are picture books that focus on one idea, such as shape, color, time, the seasons, numbers, or the alphabet. Such books enable children to observe and learn to use labels linked to different aspects of a concept. In the discussion, encourage parents to explore what they know about the concept and highlight how the book illustrates these points.

Discussion about the reading strategy. Parents are encouraged to talk with their young children about the different shapes in the preschool picture book. Which ones are familiar? Children hear the words that name these shapes, associate them with the pictures, and repeat the labels often. Referring to the pictures, parents ask questions to generate ample practice in labeling, and begin teaching their children how to classify elements of the concept ("Show me the..." "What is this?" "Tell me what you see here").

With the elementary-level book, many concepts about home and house are presented. Here parents can ask more varied questions: Where do ants live? Where is the bee's house? Help me read this page—a web is a house for a.... Parents should try to read through almost to the end of the page, asking their children to "fill in the last word."

Family Stories

Preschool: *What Do Toddlers Do?* by Debbie Slier

Elementary: *The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies* by Stan Berenstain and Jan Berenstain

Reading strategy: relating reading to personal experience

Discussion about the genre. For children, the best stories are often the ones they hear about their own families. Children love to learn about what happened when their parents were children and were growing up. Ask parents about stories they remember their own parents telling them when they were young. What are some stories they might pass on to their children? Point out to parents that these stories serve to strengthen closeness between generations within a family. Family stories found in books help parent and child make links to their own experiences.

Discussion about the reading strategy. Parents help their children make connections between book events and family experiences in order to help children understand the book by making it "come alive." Encourage parents to use the everyday experiences of toddlers in the preschool book to talk about the same things their children do at home: Look at the baby's toys. What are *your* favorite toys? Is this the way you take your bath? With the elementary book they could try the following sort of approach: Oh, the little bears were not listening to Mama and Papa in the

store. Has that ever happened when we've gone to the store? Parents should try to help their children focus on what is similar and different about the storybook experience and their own personal family experiences.

Poetry

Preschool: *Tomie dePaola's Mother Goose* by Tomie dePaola
Elementary: *Alligator Pie* by Dennis Lee
Reading strategy: rereading

Discussion about the genre. Begin by asking parents what poems or rhymes they remember from childhood. What poems or rhymes do they tell their own children? How do their children react to the rhymes? Point out that young children have fun playing with rhyming words, and they often want to repeat the rhymes again and again, just to hear the way the words go together. All of this makes it easier for children to remember the words and the story they tell.

Discussion about the reading strategy. To open the discussion, ask parents why they think rereading might be a particularly helpful strategy for use with poems. Emphasize again that children usually enjoy hearing rhymes over and over. Guide parents' understanding that rereading enables children to more clearly hear—and then imitate—the rhyme, building their knowledge of words and their structure. The repetition also gives readers and listeners additional chances to grasp the meaning of poetry, which often uses odd wording.

Read "Tricking" from *Alligator Pie* aloud. Ask parents what they think about the poem after this first reading. Then read the poem aloud again, and ask parents how their thinking may have changed. When parents try rereading with their children, ask them to note how much more feeling they are able to add the second time around and how much more comfortable and confident they are with the text.

Information Books

Preschool: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
Elementary: *Have You Seen Birds?* by Joanne Oppenheim and Barbara Reid
Reading strategy: KL (a variation on KWL)

Discussion about the genre. Parents will certainly know that young children are fond of asking "Why?" and that their questions are sometimes difficult to answer. Ask parents, "What are some interesting questions your children come up with?" Point out that information books open a world of new knowledge, and they can be as exciting and magi-

cal for children as fairy tales. Good information books build on what the child already knows, adding new ideas and repeating them until they become familiar. For example, in Eric Carle's vivid picture book, the young child's knowledge of being hungry, eating, and growing contributes to learning about the life cycle of the caterpillar and helps to build concrete understanding about stages in the butterfly's development. Ask parents for suggestions about other things they think their children would like to learn about, and be prepared to recommend some additional information books.

Discussion about the reading strategy. The KWL strategy helps older readers identify the information they are looking for and organize and remember it as they read. The letters stand for what I already *k*now, what I *w*ant to learn, and what I have *l*earned.

For younger children, the strategy can be modified as KL. It can be used by a parent to help the child connect new information to what he or she already knows, thereby making the new information easier to understand. To begin, have parents try using the KL strategy themselves by role-playing with their children and asking "What do I already know about caterpillars and butterflies? I've seen caterpillars crawling along the ground, and I know they eat the leaves on trees." This will help them begin to think in ways their children do, allowing them to develop strategies for modeling KL with their children and suggesting ways they can connect new information to old. For example, a parent might liken the caterpillar sleeping in the cocoon in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to Sleeping Beauty.

Newspapers

Preschool and elementary: local newspapers, grocery store flyers

Reading strategy: providing a reading model (preschool), using parts of a text (elementary)

Discussion about the genre. Start with a group reading and discussion of a few interesting articles or sections from a local newspaper. Ask parents to share favorite stories, photographs, comics, horoscopes, etc. Now ask the following questions:

- What is something that you frequently read at home and enjoy?
- What do you enjoy about reading the newspaper (or magazine, cookbook, etc.)?
- Do you read the whole paper, or just certain sections?

Discussion about the reading strategy: Providing a reading model. Tell parents that research has indicated that when a child frequently sees adults reading for enjoyment or with a purpose (or both together), this helps the child develop positive attitudes toward reading. Children come to understand that reading is important when adults show that they are really readers. When children see parents reading newspapers or magazines and hear them talking about what they have read, they realize that reading is a way to learn more about the world and to find enjoyment. They often want to imitate this parental activity.

To help parents build their children's familiarity with the newspaper, ask them to cut out pictures from a copy to make a story they can tell their child. Pictures should be glued to construction paper in order to make a beginning, middle, and end. Parents can share their stories with one another before showing them to the children.

At home, parents can try two activities:

1. Using a flyer from a grocery store, parent and child can play "going shopping." The parent should indicate that they need to make a list of things they want to buy from the grocery store, saying, "Let's cut out pictures of food from the flyer and glue them on some paper. We can take it to the store. Then we will remember what we need to buy."
2. Ask parents to read the paper with their children, talking together about the comics, news, or sports, and using the pictures whenever possible.

Discussion about the reading strategy: Using parts of a text. Parents will know that it is not always easy finding your way through a newspaper. Ask them why. Point out that the newspaper often has many sections and inserts, but that over the years, they have become familiar with the way the paper is organized and know how to find what they are looking for. School-age children need guidance in learning about the parts of a newspaper. Parents can make games out of reading the paper (and can also show older children how to go through the paper without "messing it up"). Suggest that if parents have older children at home, they can design a newspaper scavenger hunt, asking the children to find certain things (such as the comics, a particular picture, ads for a toy store, or news about their home town).

(Note that many newspapers have "Newspaper in Education" programs and offer resources for learning activities. *Family Learning Links*, published in 1991 by The Commercial Appeal, is a particularly useful resource that provides a wide variety of learning activities for parents and children to use at home.)

A Successful Introduction

Activities such as those described in this chapter have provided a successful introduction to Family Reading in our program. The use of children's literature, many opportunities for reading aloud, and the emphasis on group discussion about books and reading strategies have proven very popular with parents and children alike. Parents frequently express surprise and delight at the ways in which their children respond in shared reading sessions and retain information about the books they read: "On the way to school today Krista spotted something on the sidewalk and said it was a cocoon. Isn't that something? She remembered it from the *Hungry Caterpillar*." After Family Reading is well established both at home and in school, parents frequently note that they are more interested in reading with their children, engage in reading at home more often, and feel more relaxed about it. They also say that when they visit the library with their children, they are more confident about what books to look for and suggest.

This is just the beginning, however. The positive introduction provided by these core activities paves the way for individualized literacy activities that engage parents in more extensive reading and writing. These are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Extension Activities for Parent Reading and Writing

The core routines for Family Reading day presented in the last chapter ensure that parents become familiar with a variety of children's literature and are comfortable with regular shared reading at home. Other activities undertaken during Family Reading encourage parents to discover, develop, and use their literacy strengths and skills to explore the world of children's literature more deeply and to express themselves through writing.

Once routines are established and program participants are familiar with them, parents soon express a desire to take greater charge of their own learning. A family literacy program should provide opportunities for expression of individual creativity and ideas and respect parents'

choices about how to use literacy with and on behalf of their children. Experiences of choice and the sense of accomplishment that results when those choices are successfully acted on have provided powerful motivation for many parents in our program to continue their educations and begin career planning.

As part of our course requirements, parents choose two children's books, try them at home with their children, and prepare book reports about them for presentation to the group. They are encouraged to try writing a book for their own child. They keep their own journals throughout the course, and they create "memory books" containing mementos and recollections of the program for their children. Parents have wide latitude in determining how they will undertake these projects, and the topics and approaches they choose vary considerably. Nevertheless, parents appreciate the structure of identified assignments that fit in with their expectations for evaluation.

A classroom environment where creativity can be exercised and writing and reading explored is important to the success of Family Reading day. A large part of our fundraising efforts go to maintaining a range of interesting children's literature in our class library, including, whenever possible, multiple copies of books selected for group reading. Writing material, paints, markers, colored paper, and other supplies parents may need for creating books are available in the family room. Today we also have available samples of work done by earlier participants in the program, donated by the parents themselves. However, when we first started, we wrote book reports and made children's books alongside the parents. This was tremendously beneficial, because when they saw our own stops and starts, the parents gained confidence to overcome that initial hesitancy most of us feel when we are trying to write something new.

Book Reports

As parents learn more about children's literature and observe their children's growing love of reading, they are encouraged to explore books further and to share their discoveries with other parents. Many discover or rediscover the public library and begin to visit more frequently as their children become active readers. During the course of the semester, parents choose two books (one for preschoolers and one for school-age children), read them at home with their children, prepare written reports about them, and share their reports in class. At least one of the books is chosen from the public library.

In preparing their reports, parents are introduced to the process approach to writing (see, for example, Farr & Tone, 1994). They use materials developed by our school district for students in the primary grades

(District School Board of Niagara, 1994). Our parents were very interested to learn about and use the same process that their children would encounter later in school. They felt that doing so would enable them to develop the confidence to offer assistance when their children entered the primary grades.

Each parent is given a writing folder where they accumulate their rough drafts. Included in the folder is an organizer that reminds parents of the steps in writing a report (Figure 19). These organizers are also useful for keeping track of what has already been done, and we refer to them frequently in our regular parent-teacher writing conferences. We also distribute an outline for planning a book report (Figure 20). Parents

Figure 19 Writing Organizer

- Brainstorm and make very rough notes—just jot down ideas without paying attention to spelling, sentences, or grammar.
- Make an outline. Group your ideas into different topics such as About the Story, Reading Tips (what strategies worked), What I Liked, and What My Child Liked.
- Make a rough first draft. Try to do it in sentences and paragraphs. Don't even think about spelling yet. If ideas for illustrations come to mind, jot them down.
- Make a second draft by fixing what you have, working on it until it makes sense and you are happy with it. Think more about illustrations. Try some of the illustrating to see how it will look.
- Confer with someone about your draft. Now is the time to edit for meaning and for grammar and spelling.
- Create the final copy. Word-process, type, or neatly print the text. Make your illustrations (draw, trace, cut and paste, etc.).
- We can't wait to see and hear about it!

Figure 20 Book Report Planner

Try to make your report interesting for other parents—maybe make it in some unusual form, such as a flyer, an ad, or a mobile. To get ideas, check out some of the samples that have been done by other parents.

No matter how you design it, try to include the following things in your report:

- title, author, and the age that the book is suitable for
- book type (see list of story genres) and something about the book to explain why it is that type
- why someone should pick this book to read to a child
- what appealed to you about the book (such as illustrations or rhymes)
- "Reading Tips for Parents," where you share ideas about reading the book with children and suggestions about how to increase child interest in the book
- three things another parent could do to help a child understand and enjoy the book
- a list of new words parents should explain and some questions they could ask children about the story

Before you start your final draft and illustrations, remember to confer with someone!

generally find these handouts helpful, and they serve to build parent confidence. As one parent noted, "Once you have the recipe, you just try it out until it works!"

On each Family Reading day, selected parents bring their children's books to class and read them to the group. They then use their written reports as guides for leading discussion. Whenever possible, we make copies of the reports for other parents to use when making choices about books for future shared reading experiences.

We have found that parents enjoy the book report project, in spite of the negative experiences many have had with school and school assignments and their often low confidence in their abilities as writers. We encourage parents to think of their reports as recommendations about a good book they wish to share with others. Many start off by creating illustrations for their reports, and this seems to ease the way into writing.

Following are some examples of parent book reports that give a sense of the variety parents bring to this activity and their high level of involvement with it.

Canadian Fire Fighters by Paulette Bourgeois

Report by Dawn Irwin

Pop Quiz

1. Learn the number for the fire department. Practice saying your _____ and the nearest _____. Remember that no one should ever call from inside a burning building. Call from a neighbor's home. You can call from a pay phone, even if you have no money. Dial the operator by pressing _____ or the emergency number _____.
2. If there is smoke or fire, yell, "Fire!" Feel any doors before opening them. If they are hot, you should _____. You should have an escape window planned in case of fire. If your escape window will not open, you should _____.
3. Children, when should you touch matches??? _____.

If you or your child have had a hard time answering these questions, then you need to take a look at this book. If you answered them all correctly and would like to learn more about fire fighters and fire safety, then you should read this book.

Canadian Fire Fighters is an excellent book not only because it is full of useful facts but also because it is fun to read, interesting, and has great pictures. Paulette Bourgeois [author] and Kim Lafave [illustrator] have taken the tall guys in black and made them into real people that kids can relate to, with a more in-depth understanding of what they do and how it is done. Everyone loves a fire fighter and everyone will love this book.

[The cover page of this report is shown in Figure 21.]

Happy and Sad, Grouchy and Glad [a Little Golden Book]

Report by Joy Chicoski

Happy and Sad, Grouchy and Glad is a great concept and poetry book that is filled with characters from the popular children's show, *Sesame Street*.

Figure 21 Cover of a Parent Book Report

CANADIAN

FIRE FIGHTERS

PAULETTE BOURGEOIS • • •

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The author makes the reader a part of an audience watching a play put on by the characters about feelings. I feel this book is good, because it gives children examples of what makes them feel happy, sad, or angry.

The pages are filled with a lot of colorful pictures showing each of the feelings, so the child can relate to them. The rhyming sentences also make this story fun for children to listen to. Altogether, I feel this is a good fun filled book that both the parents and the children will enjoy.

[The parent created this report in the shape of the road sign for "Sesame Street," and included illustrations of many of the *Sesame Street* characters.]

The Cat Came Back by Bill Slavin

Report by Sharon Dianard

We liked the story because of the rhythm. It seemed to keep Stephanie's attention. Since the book is not very long, their interest is easily kept and when the story is over, the song on the back keeps the activity going. *The Cat Came Back* is a predictable book for preschool children, but would be enjoyed by all children.

This is a story about a man named Mr. Johnson. He has a cat that he doesn't want to keep. So he tries to get rid of it in a lot of funny ways. But the cat manages to come back each time. I would recommend the book, as the illustrations are comical and colorful. Also the book was a lot of fun to read.

Reading Tips

When reading this book, keep the rhythm going at a steady pace, but not too fast. Really try to dramatize the words, give the children time to look at the pictures on each page. Ask them questions like, "What is going to happen next? Why do they think so?" "Do you think the cat is going to come back?" "Why does he want to stay with the man?" "How do you think he should keep the cat away?"

[This report was done as a pop-up book, with a cut-out illustration of a cat on the cover and a pop-up cat face inside.]

Writing Books for Children

After they have read some children's books, we encourage parents to write stories for their own children. Ideas are discussed and initial suggestions offered based on the children's likes, fears, favorite places or animals, and much more. Over the course of the program, as they become familiar with different genres, parents can choose to create a concept book, a poetry or storybook, or an information book. For some parents, concept books are a good first choice because once the focus has been established, writing can be limited to a few words per page, supplemented by illustrations.

With guidance through the writing process from brainstorming to illustrating, parents develop a sense of their own writing competence and begin to enjoy their creativity. We have found the Story Starter Guide shown in Figure 22 particularly useful in providing support for our novice writers, many of whom benefit from some structure. This guide helps parents gather ideas for a story and make connections between everyday events and possible story themes.

Figure 22 Story Starter Guide

Tips for Creating Stories

1. Draw a line down the center of a page. On the left side, write (in point form) things that happened during the past few days. Write quickly, without thinking. Write whatever comes to mind.
2. Read over the left side of the page. If an event brings to mind a story idea—maybe based on an animal, for example—or any extra detail, write it on the right side of the page. Read the left side of the page several times, until you are happy with the story ideas on the right side of the page.
3. Choose a story idea from the right side of the page that would be easy and enjoyable for you to work on and great for your child to hear.
4. Now you are ready to start your first draft. Use short sentences and words that your child will understand (a few challenging words would be fine).
5. Confer with someone about your idea and the draft.
6. Decide how your story should appear as a book: Will the words appear at the top, middle, or bottom of the page? Which sentences will appear on each page? What sort of illustrations are you going to include?
7. Be proud of yourself and enjoy your book with your child!

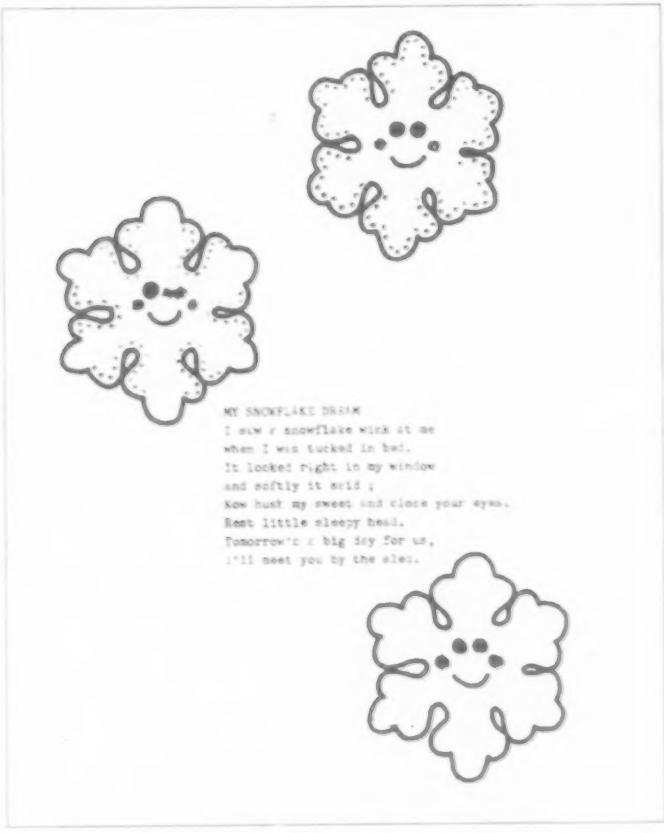
Parents always think deeply about the topics they select, so that the stories they create will appeal to their children while conveying lessons. Following are excerpts from parent-made books that suggest the parents' creativity and their strong desire to share literacy experiences with their children. Some sample pages appear in Figure 23 on pages 84 and 85.

Soggy Mittens and Other Winter Blues by Beth Stephens is an illustrated book of six poems that reflect on winter activities and the trials of getting dressed in warm outdoor clothes. As shown in this excerpt, one poem named the children in the program, and all participating parents enjoyed taking the book home to read with their children:

Lost Mittens
I lost my mittens yesterday,
and twice again today.
I've looked and looked and looked again,
Yet lost they want to stay.
My mother said to wear them home,
So my hands would not get cold.
And so I guess I'll stay at school,
Until I'm very old.

Snow Clothes
Charlie has a red scarf on,
Allaina's wearing blue.
Taylor's dressed in green today,
A snowsuit that's brand new.
Kayla chose a purple hat,
Joey's hat is brown.
Ashley's has a yellow stripe
All around the crown.

Figure 23 Sample Pages From Parent-Made Children's Books


MY SNOWFLAKE DREAM
I saw a snowflake wink at me
when I was tucked in bed.
It looked right in my window
and softly it said ;
Now hush my sweet and close your eyes.
Rest little sleepy head.
Tomorrow's a big day for us,
I'll meet you by the sled.

From *Soggy Mittens and Other Winter Blues*

AND PAST THE TALL EVERGREEN
UNTIL AT LAST HER CASTLE WAS IN SIGHT SHE RAN QUICKLY INSIDE TO HER FAMILY. IN THE SAFTY OF HER MOTHERS ARM, SHE DOSED OFF, AND DREAMED OF HER ADVENTURES IN THE GARDEN

From *The Cat and the Garden*

(continued)

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Figure 23 Sample Pages From Parent-Made Children's Books (continued)

March

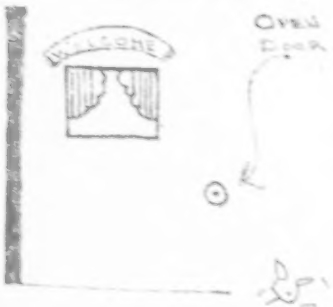
March is the 3rd month of the year. On March 21st we celebrate the first day of spring.

March

Even though the calendar says it's spring in Canada we may still have snow. Usually by the end of the month the warm sun melts away the snow.

April

April is the 4th month of the year. During April we celebrate Easter. Can you guess who comes at Easter?



April

I like getting ready for Easter. My Mom and I colour eggs and we invite friends over for an "Easter Egg Hunt". My Mom says that if I am a nice girl, the Easter Bunny will come and fill my basket with chocolate and treat

From *Months of the Year*

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Becky Michaelson's *The Cat and the Garden* tells a story about thinking calmly to find your way home and is illustrated with construction-paper cut-outs:

> Once upon a time there was a beautiful orange cat, who lived in a castle with her family.
>
> One day the cat decided to go to the garden. It was her favorite place to play. It was here that she could dance with the butterflies and hide in the flowers.
>
> She headed deeper into the garden, past the tall evergreen, through the daisies, and around the birdbath.
>
> Soon it started to get dark, and the cat realized she was lost, which made her very sad. The kitten wanted to get home, so she thought of where she had been. Around the birdbath, through the daisies, and past the tall evergreen....

Months of the Year by Melissa Cuviello depicts something memorable for each month, from the viewpoint of a child narrator. Mother and daughter created the illustrations and loved to look through the book each night before bedtime. This parent was delighted that her first attempt was so successful, and she has written other books for her daughter since that time.

> Hello, my name is Cathy and I would like you to join me for a walk through the twelve months of the year. Bundle up warm because it's very cold in January....
>
> February is the 2nd month of the calendar year. On February the 14th we celebrate St. Valentines Day, this is when we tell all of the special people in our lives how much we love them.
>
> In February I like to cut out paper hearts and write special words on them, such as:
>
> "Roses are Red
> Violets are Blue
> Sugar is Sweet,
> and I love you."
>
> This is what we call a Valentine....

Parent Journals

From the start of the program, parents keep personal journals of reflections, observations about parenting, concerns, questions, and plans. We explain that these journals will help them note their child's development and any changes in behavior over the course of the semester. Journals provide opportunities for parents to think about their day-to-day experiences in view of what they are learning in the program. Writing and rereading journal entries gives them time to think about themselves, their children, their past, and their hopes and plans for the future.

Of course, journals also fit well into the program's goals for parents' literacy development. Just as a love of reading grows through being read to and reading stories one enjoys, so too a love of writing can develop

through numerous opportunities for free expression of feelings, thoughts, and concerns. Although each semester one or two of the adults report that they have kept diaries in the past, most of the parents have usually had no experience with this form of writing.

After assuring parents that the journals will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared without consent, the adult educator asks permission to read them on a weekly basis and to respond in writing to selected entries. To date, all parents have agreed to this request. The adult educator has considered it a privilege to share in the private thoughts and concerns of participants, and reading the journals has given her a deep appreciation for the challenges that many families face. At the same time, the journals have provided an excellent means of monitoring progress over the course of the semester and have offered insight into parents' concerns about the program for themselves and their children.

Parents are expected to write in their journals at least three times a week, and are asked to date each entry. Time is provided for this writing, with parents taking advantage of quiet periods when they first arrive at the program site, are waiting for other parents to return from taking their children to the play room or from the break, or have completed an in-class assignment early. We have found that parents also frequently take their journals home for writing on the weekends.

Parents are encouraged to organize their thinking about journal writing around three topics—Myself, My Child's Learning, and Parenting—and to focus an entry on each of these topics each week. As parents discuss more about child development and parenting concerns and strategies in class, these topics often begin to appear in the journals. The recommended format is discussed, and parents are provided with some examples to get them started (see Figure 24 on page 88).

The following excerpts from parent journals offer a sample of parents' personal reflections, interest in their children's learning, and concerns. In the next chapter some of the parenting issues raised in these entries are discussed in greater detail.

Sept. 12

> Lynn is already learning some songs. Before we started this class she only knew the Barney song. It has only been four days that we are here and today on the way to school she was singing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." So I am very pleased with how well she is doing already. She does not know her ABC's yet, but maybe within the next few weeks she will know them.

Oct. 15

> It bugs me when I put Joey to bed & he gets right back out. It make me really mad. I really don't know what to do. I think Joey is just going through a stage. When Joey get out of the crib, I just put him back. Joey father calls me animal because I loud at him and then I put him back. But I love Joey very much.

Figure 24 Journal Starters

Writing About Myself

- *Personal Goals*
  I would like to make some changes to....
  I'm tired of....
  I think I'm going to....
  I wonder how I would go about getting....
- *Personal Strengths*
  Something happened that made me feel good...
  I really like it when....
  One of the things I've learned from experience....
- *Personal Concerns*
  It bugs me when....
  I don't know what to do about....

My Child's Learning

- *At School*
  Julie likes to count everything now....
  I'm not sure if Colby is really understanding this week's book....
- *At Home*
  When we are getting ready for bed, Janey goes right for a book....

Parenting

- *Problems*
  We've been watching so much TV that I've decided to....
  I'm having trouble with Danny biting....
  Joyce is starting to wet the bed at night. Last night she....
- *Working on Solutions*
  I tried a time-out when Danny bit me yesterday. It did not work very well. He....
- *Special Moments*
  Jonathan and I were making the bed this morning when out of the blue he said, "I got a pretty Mom." I felt....
  Yesterday I was kind of down. Sandra must have been able to tell because she said, "Why you sad?" We talked about....

Oct. 29

Amanda loves storytime now. She looks forward to us reading to her each night. It has now become a routine. I will admit that I used to read to them very seldom. But since I have been coming here I have been reading to them every night. I see how important it is to read to them. Now with Michael not being able to read properly, I think maybe this problem is because of me not reading to him.

Oct. 30

We still can't get Whitney toilet trained. She'll be three in three months—I think it's time she had learned. I think she is too lazy and can't be bothered.

Nov. 28

Today we worked on the caterpillar. When we came home we gathered up some meat trays and decorated them with beads, stickers, crayons. We had fun.

March 2

Mike is going away for the weekend and I was going to go out with my friend, but as usual he is trying to sabotage that too. We had a big argument about it. Then he brings up about me going to school. It just seems lately every thing I do seems to be wrong in his eyes. I'm getting to the point I'm getting sick of it. I'm really tired of him trying to control me.

Memory Books

In this project, greatly enjoyed by adults and children alike, parents create a memento of precious time spent learning together with their children. We purchase attractive scrapbooks in which parents can accumulate their work, and this contributes to their enthusiasm about planning entries and layout. Assembling the pages becomes very much a group effort, and the atmosphere in the classroom becomes one of relaxed conversation as parents share ideas and materials.

To help parents begin planning the project, we first talk about some possibilities for starting a memory book:

1. A dedication to the child is a special way to start. It should be simple, perhaps giving the child's name and the span of time covered in the book, and talking briefly about feelings of love, pride, and happiness.
2. A family biography could be included, with information about the child's birth, his or her parents and other relatives, home (current and previous), and the child's "firsts" (first word, first steps, etc.).
3. Parents can consider addressing the child directly. For example, if they are beginning the book at the child's birth, they can write a letter to her or him about the thrill of the child's birth, the love felt for the child, and other special memories of first days together. If the book is to begin at entry to the family literacy program, parents can write about coming to school and special things they have enjoyed doing in class with their children.
4. Children and parents love to look back and remember the things they enjoyed doing together: eating, playing, dressing, and bed and bath times. Such times can be used as titles for sections in the book.
5. Parents can write some sentences about how their child plays and learns. Examples of artwork the child created in class can be included. Which creative activities are the child's favorite? Gluing? Painting? Drawing?
6. We often take photographs of the children in the play room and during circle time. Parents are free to choose some for inclusion and can write a headline or sentence next to each picture.

7. To maintain the focus on literacy learning, parents can write about shared reading. Do they have a special place at home for shared reading? In bed? Sitting in a certain chair? How do they get ready for storytime? How does the parent find ways to make reading time successful? What are elements of the child's own style for sharing a book? Is the child usually quiet and sleepy, or full of activity during storytime? Does he or she ask questions at the end of the story or during the reading? What is the parents' style for shared reading? What do they like about this time? What are the books they enjoy? How do they read? With different voices? By introducing games to play with the book? By making rules about how to act? Are they relaxed about reading, or uptight? Why do they share books with their child? How do they make shared reading part of family life? How does family reading help the child learn to read and write?

Most parents seem to find the letter format effective for conveying a simple message to their children. As a result, we have assembled a selection of "openers" for letters, which we post around the room for easy reference (Figure 25). In addition to the suggestions just outlined, parents can use these openers to provide structure as they begin their work.

Once they have begun preparing their materials, parents use writing folders to keep track of revisions. They work in pairs to check grammar

Figure 25 Sample Memory Book Openers

Dear _____,
This is a record of how we shared storybooks. You are ___ years old. We love to read together. I want to write these times down so you can look back and remember.

Dear _____,
You loved reading [title of book]. While we were reading this book together I noticed.... I also notice that you like certain things to be just so when we read....

Dear _____,
One of my favorite times with you in the last little while was when we were reading [title of book]. It was special because....

Dear _____,
You have your own way of doing things when we share storybooks. For instance....

Dear _____,
You are always curious and learning from our storybook times. Wow! You come up with interesting questions. They really make me think sometimes. For instance....

and spelling in each other's drafts. Final copies are handwritten by the parents, or typed or word-processed by parents, the teacher, or volunteers. The care the adult participants take in creating these books and their pride in the finished products are obvious in the following excerpts.

Dear Elsa,

All our times together have been very special. In this book we have tried to include as many as we could for you, to look back on. Everyday you do something or say something that is amazing to us. We wish we could record everything—your smile, your laugh, and your funny ways of saying things. This will help us to look back and remember them.

We hope you'll grow up knowing how proud we are of everything you do. You have brought so much joy into our life. We want to share with you as much as we can through this book. We'll always love you and we'll always be there for you.

Love, Mom and Dad

Dear Geoffrey,

This is a record of important days for you that we have shared together. To share in your interests meant a great deal to me through your young years.

When I started this in November of 1993 you were three years old.... I wanted to write these times down so we can look back and try to remember the good times we shared.

Love, Mom

Brandy,

You have your own way of doing things, when we share storybooks. For instance, now I can do my dishes while you sit at the table and read to me. You are getting older and sometimes I could cry, because soon ("before too long") you'll be reading to your children and not to mom.

When we read together, there are some things we always do. For instance, we laugh and joke about the book, we pick which book we already read and decide on another. Sometimes we read my books, not the scary ones, the romantic ones. All in all, I try to make reading fun instead of boring.

Cody,

It's so adorable, how you try to use the words you have heard in our stories. For instance, yesterday you were 20 months old and some new words you are saying, like car, bus, school. Today you were sick, but you wanted to go to school with me.

Lindsey,

You are always curious and learning from our storybook times. You can come up with interesting questions, when we are reading. They really make me think sometimes. For instance, in *Franklin in the Dark* his mother was afraid he was lost. You asked me what I would do if you got lost, and till this day I'm still thinking. I know I would be very upset, but I really can't answer you now.

Reading, Writing, and More

While Family Reading day pays special attention to reading and writing with children, parents in the program feel that this time also addresses their own literacy needs. For some, journal writing provides a chance for much-needed quiet contemplation. When they are working on book reports and book making at home, they are using their creativity. In addition, they often report happiness that they are providing an example for their older children of how home routines can be organized so that schoolwork is completed. As one parent noted, her fifth-grade son was so impressed with his mother's assignments that he started to bring home extra work from school.

At the same time, Family Literacy day is a springboard to integrating other aspects of the program through literacy activities. Memory books, for example, often contain samples of children's work accomplished with Make-Try-Take craft activities. Journal writing helps parents to become keen observers of their children's development and literacy learning and to sort out thoughts about parenting, the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Parenting Issues

At the start of a new semester, once the adult participants have come to know one another, their conversation inevitably turns to a plethora of questions of the "What do you do when your child...?" type. Young parents often feel daunted by child rearing and the problem-solving and interpersonal skills required to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of their children. Even older and more experienced parents face new challenges as their families grow and change.

In the early days of our program, we learned we could not ignore parents' urgent need to find answers to their questions and concerns. We are not parenting experts, but we were motivated by a strong desire to offer assistance where we could. We shared our own experiences of sleepless nights, embarrassment at tantrums and unruliness in

public, and uncertainty about whether we knew the right thing to do. Throughout, we tried to establish a positive atmosphere for sharing feelings and ideas about parenting.

We realized that success in parenting was directly related to the self-esteem and confidence of our adult participants. By addressing parenting as a fundamental part of the program, we found that parents began to make more connections between home and program activities, listened more closely to the ideas and suggestions of others, and came to see themselves as more competent and able to cope. And these things had a positive impact on their literacy learning. We have therefore incorporated a Parenting strand into our regular program routine.

A subtext of any parenting component in a family literacy program is the opportunity it provides for meaningful use of literacy skills. In this chapter we describe the structure and activities that enable parents in our program to use literacy abilities to express concerns about parenting, develop interpersonal and problem-solving skills, access group support, and practice alternative parenting strategies.

Establishing a Parenting Perspective

When we first decided to include Parenting as one of our program strands, we looked for work by experts who we felt offered parents support and direction while respecting their individual experiences. We found several resources that seemed to us useful for introducing effective parenting strategies, including Colorosso (1989), Crary (1990, 1993), Dinkmeyer and McKay (1989), Huntley (1991), and Manolson (1995). However, the work of Jean Illsley-Clarke, including *Self-Esteem: A Family Affair* (1978, 1981) and *Growing up Again* (Illsley-Clarke & Dawson, 1989), became our foundation for offering parents a way to describe their parenting styles and think about parent problem solving. These publications suggest a framework for analyzing conflicts and developing problem solving in ways that maintain the self-esteem of both parent and child. With a rich supply of examples drawn from critical incidents typical at developmental stages from infancy through adolescence, Illsley-Clarke explains effective parent-child interaction in a way that resonates with parents' experiences.

Her ideas about a parenting style that involves structure and nurture in contrast to criticism, a "marshmallow" approach, and abandonment make sense to parents.

- *Structure and nurture*

  In this positive parenting style, the parent gives messages that the child can do things and will be supported. The child learns how to do things (structure) and that she is cared for

(nurture). Parents are clear about "always" and "sometimes" rules. By establishing structure, parents can identify non-negotiable and negotiable rules and establish and enforce consequences, while nurture communicates mutual respect and love. "If you want to ride your bike, you need to wear a helmet" and "I know you can do it" are examples of statements that might be made in this parenting style.

- *Criticism*

  This style labels the child with insults and "bad names" rather than providing standards for acceptable behavior. Criticism often includes all-encompassing words such as "never" and "always." In its most devastating form, this style descends to ridicule that mocks and derides. Sample messages from this style include "If you wet your pants, I'll put you back in diapers, like a baby" and "If you don't stop crying, I'll give you something to cry about."

- *Marshmallow parenting*

  Here, freedom is granted without expectations of responsibility. It sounds like a supportive style, but it implies that the child does not have to follow or is incapable of following rules. It discounts the child's ability and gives permission and allows excuses for irresponsibility and failure. At the same time, it lets the parent look good, play the martyr, or feel in control. A sample message might be "She can eat whatever she wants. I always had to eat what was put out. You're only a child once."

- *Abandonment*

  This style omits rules, protection, and contact. It tells the child that the adult is not available. Teasing is often part of this style. A sample message here is "I'm fed up. You can go to bed whenever you're tired."

As suggested by Illsley-Clarke and Dawson (1989), we ask parents to role-play these styles in situations that involve typical parenting conflicts. All of them recognize the styles from their day-to-day interactions with their children, and they complete this task easily, gaining new insight about their own approaches.

In our opinion, one of the most successful components of Illsley-Clarke's (1981) program is the "suggestion circle." This became the starting point for our informal discussions during each week's Parenting session in PTT. The suggestion circle usually occupies 15 to 20 minutes, during which time one participant volunteers to raise a parenting concern for the group to consider. Group suggestions are recorded, and the con-

cerned parent agrees to try one or more of them and to report back the following week.

To introduce parents to the suggestion circle, we present a wall chart that describes the roles of the various participants (Figure 26). In addition, we have found that by identifying some group "rules" for interaction at the beginning of the program, discussion becomes more productive. Following Illsley-Clarke's advice, we ask that throughout the suggestion circle, parents show respect for others, share the floor, focus on "here-and-now" problems and constructive suggestions for help, and contribute to a positive atmosphere, offering compliments whenever possible. We also stress that everything from the discussion must remain confidential.

Following are some examples of the sorts of problems parents typically raise in the suggestion circle:

- "I can't get Amy to go to bed on time. She dawdles and I get mad."
- "Jeff won't stay in his own room at night. He always ends up in our bed."
- "I can't stand Trevor's whining instead of asking."
- "Gina is a picky eater. She never eats what I give her."
- "Beth should be toilet trained by now. She's 3 years old and I think she's just lazy about it."
- "Lindsey is mean to her younger sister—she pinches and teases."

Figure 26 Guidelines for Suggestion Circle

For the parent with a concern:
- Keep it simple. Try to state one concern in one sentence.
- Accept suggestions positively. Thank suggesters for each one.
- Listen to suggestions and choose one to try.

For suggesters:
- Everyone try to make a suggestion. Don't be shy.
- Think of something similar that happened to you. How did you handle it?

For the recorder:
- Keep it simple. Write the problem in one sentence.
- If you are not sure, ask the parent to explain more.
- Write each suggestion in one sentence. Make a list.

Adapted from Illsley-Clarke, J. (1981). *Self-esteem: A family affair* (Leader guide). San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.

Organizing for Parenting Sessions

While the format of Parenting is organized informally around suggestion circle, other topics and assignments also are included to help parents analyze particular concepts and practice new skills.

Teaching Techniques

We use the following instructional techniques to facilitate parents' exploration of particular topics.

- *Role-play*

  Group members work in pairs, one taking on the role of the parent and the other of the child, to act out typical conflicts or to demonstrate particular parenting styles. We also invite participants to act out positive experiences, perhaps of taking their infants home from the hospital or of first expressing love for their children. These exercises encourage parents to share with others, to think of both good and bad experiences, and to recall their own models for parenting from childhood.

- *Directed reading and discussion*

  We collect newspaper and magazine articles on parenting issues and introduce these in class discussions or distribute copies for home reading prior to discussion. Parents also are encouraged to bring in articles of interest to share. In a program's early days, before a reserve of articles can be assembled, the collection of articles published in *Bringing up Our Children* (Alexander, 1990) may be useful.

- *Videotapes and postviewing discussion*

  A number of videos present typical incidents of parent-child conflict and are especially effective in highlighting a variety of problem-solving strategies. Several we have found useful are included in the resource list provided in Figure 27 on page 98. Postviewing discussion provides a time for clarifying points raised in the video and for connecting the video to personal experience.

- *Invited speakers*

  We have been fortunate in finding speakers willing to visit the program and provide information on a variety of topics. Potential speakers may be identified and located through public health offices, public education staff at emergency services departments, career-counseling staff from the local school district, family services teams work-

Figure 27 Parenting Resources

Books

Alexander, S. (Ed.). (1990). *Bringing up our children: Articles from* The Knoxville News. North Billerica, MA: Curriculum Associates.

Azrin, N., & Foxx, R. (1974). *Toilet training in less than a day*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Crary, E. (1990). *Pick up your socks!* Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Crary, E. (1993). *Without spanking or spoiling*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Essa, E. (1995). *A practical guide to solving preschool behavior problems*. Albany, NY: Delmar.

Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (1980). *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk*. New York: Avon.

Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (1987). *Siblings without rivalry*. New York: Avon.

Health and Welfare Canada. (1992). *Nobody's perfect* (Leader guide). Ottawa, ON: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada. (See also Wood-Catano, 1992)

Hewitt, D. (1995). *So this is normal too?* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf.

Huntley, R. (1991). *The sleep book for tired parents*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Illsley-Clarke, J. (1978). *Self-esteem: A family affair*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.

Ilsley-Clarke, J. (1981). *Self-esteem: A family affair* (Leader guide). San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins.

Illsley-Clarke, J., & Dawson, C. (1989). *Growing up again: Parenting ourselves, parenting our children*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Educational Materials.

Illsley-Clarke, J., Kemp, S., Nordeman, G., & Petersen, E. (1986). *Help! For parents of infants from birth to 6 months*. New York: Harper & Row.

Manolson, A. (1995). *You make the difference*. Toronto, ON: Hanen Centre.

Wood-Catano, J. (1992). *Nobody's perfect* (Booklet series). Ottawa, ON: Health and Welfare Canada, Ministry of Supply and Services. (See also Health and Welfare Canada, 1992)

Videotapes

Colorosso, B. (1989). *Winning at parenting...without beating your kids*. Littleton, CO: Kids Are Worth It.

Common childhood illnesses. (1991). Charleston, WV: Cambridge Research Group.

Dinkmeyer, D., & McKay, G. (1989). *Early childhood STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Children Under Six)*. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Services.

The ouchless house: Baby safe your home. (1992). Charleston, WV: Cambridge Research Group.

Phelan, T.W. (1990). *1, 2, 3, magic*. Glen Ellyn, IL: Child Management.

Shaking, hitting, spanking: What to do instead. (1990). Lake Zurich, IL: Learning Seed.

ing in the areas of drug abuse, family violence, or child abuse, and staff from community programs involved with women's issues or stress management.

Parenting Topics

In the early days of our program and again using suggestions from Illsley-Clarke (1981), we developed a set of core topics to be explored in Parenting that set the stage for reflection on childhood memories and current parenting styles:

- Why is parenting a challenging occupation?
- Memories of how your parents parented

- What is self-esteem?
- Parenting styles
- Roadblocks to communication and active listening
- Setting limits, using rules
- Using consequences, giving children choices
- Punishment and positive reinforcement
- Child development and gender stereotyping
- Safety in the home

As we delve into these topics, parents are usually eager to suggest other areas for consideration. In the past, parents have offered the following additional ideas for discussion topics:

- Toilet training
- Children's sleep habits and bedtime routines
- Child health and immunization
- A series on first aid, sun sense, car-seat safety
- Stress management for women
- Women's health (breast and cervical cancer, smoking cessation, HIV, and lifestyle choices)
- Sexual assault and self-defense
- Career options, career counseling

Parenting Resources and Teaching Materials

For most topics we rely on the many excellent parenting resources available (see Figure 27 for some recommended titles). We use these resources carefully, however, adapting their suggested exercises and activities as needed. In order for all parents to participate in the activities and accomplish them with success, materials must be reviewed to ensure that their reading and writing demands match parents' literacy levels. Many parenting resources are written at an advanced reading level, covering several concepts within a paragraph and introducing considerable terminology that may be unfamiliar.

We try never to leave reading and writing activities so open-ended that parents have no starting point or frame of reference for forming their ideas and constructing their opinions. For example, Huntley's (1991) excellent work on children's sleep difficulties offers a wealth of information and we happily included it in the class library. Nevertheless, using the book with participants during a specific exercise and assignment required the adult educator to do some reworking to make its contents more accessible. For example, major points identified by Huntley were reworked

Figure 28 Parent Discussion Guide: Sleep Habits

Trouble Spots for Sleepy Children

Separation: "When I close my eyes, it's dark—everything is gone. I wonder where you are...and where I am."
Ask: Does your child have difficulty separating at bedtime?

Bedtime rituals: These are important to ease the change to sleep and to being alone. They signal, "Time to go to sleep."
Ask: What are the bedtime rituals at your house? Does your child have a special thing she takes to bed?

Remember: It is easier to prevent a problem than to solve it. But you must know your family values and then set goals based on those values.
Ask: What's important to you about your child's sleep? Describe your "ideal" bedtime scene. What bugs you about bedtime with your child?

With your partner, make a list of at least five things you could do to help make getting your child to sleep a happy routine for both of you.

in a discussion guide that includes questions to be pursued during parent interviews (Figure 28). The guide gives parents a concrete opportunity to bring their own experiences to our examination of concerns about sleep habits. We have found that it is always most effective to start with what parents already know about an issue. This acknowledges the value of their experiences and understanding while allowing activities to focus on specific interests and concerns expressed in the group.

Well-written materials for parents with lower levels of reading skill do exist; see, for example, Manolson (1995) and Wood-Catano (1992). Nevertheless, even with these books, it seems that parents are more motivated to engage in reading within some sort of support structure. We therefore generally devise lessons that include such things as interactive activities and organizers for note taking to accompany the readings. Figure 29 gives an example of such a lesson plan, prepared for the "Body" booklet in Wood-Catano's (1992) *Nobody's Perfect* set.

We have developed many of our own support materials. For example, a survey of parent beliefs, based on Illsley-Clarke's (1979) four parenting styles, has led to several successful discussions (Figure 30 on pages 102 and 103). When we introduce this survey, we emphasize that there are no correct answers. Parents are usually very frank about their attitudes and parenting practices, and this gives us added insight and information to use in devising subsequent activities.

Parent Problem Solving

A major goal of discussions during Parenting sessions of PTT is to help program participants develop the problem-solving skills required to resolve conflicts in effective, positive ways that maintain family harmony. When we were doing research to develop this component of the program, we were impressed by the work of Elizabeth Crary (1990, 1993). She engages parents in thinking about alternative solutions and presents various parenting strategies, including positive reinforcement, time out, modeling, ignoring, and redirecting. She also offers a simple five-step guide for problem solving in parents' dealing with toddlers and preschoolers:

- Step 1: Identify a concern, observe, and clarify
- Step 2: Use an "ABC" analysis—what happens *after*, what happened *before*, what are the *consequences*.
- Step 3: Consider the options.
- Step 4: Develop an action plan.
- Step 5: Keep track of progress.

We adapted this approach as the basis of a home problem-solving project, incorporating the work of Colorosso (1989) and Illsley-Clarke (1981). Group members select a parenting strategy discussed in class and "test" it at home for 2 weeks, concentrating on an area of interaction

Figure 29 Plan for Lesson on Meeting Children's Health Needs

Objectives:
Parents will...
- work in pairs to read "Body" from Wood-Catano's *Nobody's Perfect*.
- summarize information to write in their "Childhood Illness" handouts.
- complete as homework what is not finished in class.

Preparation:
- Make sure there are enough copies of "Body" for every parent.
- Make photocopies of the Childhood Illness handout.

Introduction:
- Open a discussion about common childhood illnesses.
- Explain the activity and provide an example of how to summarize an illness.

Activity:
Parents may work with partners. They will read together the section on illness in "Body," summarize each illness together, and write the summary in their Childhood Illness handouts.

Check if anything is unclear or if there are things the parents are not sure of before they begin reading.

Figure 30 About Parents and Kids: A Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Below are statements that some parents think are true for them. Other parents disagree. Read each one and decide if it is true for you. Remember: There are no right or wrong answers.

Circle the number that best describes how you feel about each sentence. 1 means you strongly agree, 2 means you agree, 3 means "maybe," 4 means you disagree, and 5 means you disagree strongly.

1. Single parents don't have time to play with their children.
   1 2 3 4 5

2. Children should be seen and not heard.
   1 2 3 4 5

3. Parents can't really control children these days. There is too much outside influence.
   1 2 3 4 5

4. Parents have to set limits for children, but it should be done without ever yelling.
   1 2 3 4 5

5. Children are never too young to share responsibilities and duties around the house.
   1 2 3 4 5

6. A spank now and then gives the child the right message about who is boss.
   1 2 3 4 5

7. Parents should be in charge of setting the routines for children when it comes to eating, sleeping, dress, etc.
   1 2 3 4 5

8. Give kids freedom when they are young—life will be hard enough when they get older.
   1 2 3 4 5

9. Parents should make sure boys act like boys, otherwise they could become sissies or worse.
   1 2 3 4 5

10. Be very strict with children—if you give them an inch, they will take a yard.
    1 2 3 4 5

11. These days parents feel they are at their wits' end most of the time.
    1 2 3 4 5

12. A mother always has a special relationship with her daughter, because a daughter will have the feelings of a woman.
    1 2 3 4 5

13. Let a child know he's bad when he has done something. At least he might be ashamed.
    1 2 3 4 5

14. Girls should act like girls—more quiet, play with girl things, and help around the house.
    1 2 3 4 5

(continued)

Figure 30 About Parents and Kids: A Survey (continued)

15. It is easy to see how some parents are driven to leaving their children sometimes.
    1 2 3 4 5

16. Kids should always be given reasons. It's wrong for a parent to say, "Just do it, because I say so."
    1 2 3 4 5

17. Boys will be boys—they are always a little wilder.
    1 2 3 4 5

18. Being a young parent is worse than a prison sentence. You can feel cheated of youth and freedom.
    1 2 3 4 5

19. Parents have to let kids be on their own as soon as they can—kids learn from experience, not from parents.
    1 2 3 4 5

20. Children must get daily praise from parents, otherwise they grow up feeling like failures.
    1 2 3 4 5

21. It's harder for mothers to understand their boys, because boys just act and think differently.
    1 2 3 4 5

22. It's OK to criticize a child—it's the only way she or he will learn.
    1 2 3 4 5

23. Parents must show the child love and affection every day, or the child will grow up feeling unloved.
    1 2 3 4 5

24. Some children have a mean streak, and there is nothing a parent can do about it.
    1 2 3 4 5

Key:
These statements relate to the criticizing style of parenting: 2, 6, 10, 13, 22, 24
These statements relate to setting limits and providing structure: 4, 5, 7, 16
These statements relate to nurturing: 20, 23
These statements relate to the marshmallow style of parenting: 3, 8, 19
These statements talk about stress: 1, 11, 15, 18
These statements talk about gender stereotyping: 9, 12, 14, 17, 21

with their children that they wish to change. They also write about their experiences in terms of the five-step problem-solving model.

In our adaptation, parents keep notes on the project as they go along. We have found that our students are often intimidated by expectations for a written project. Establishing a supportive learning environment, making connections between academic content and the demands of family life,

and providing materials and approaches that support adult learners as they develop their own strategies to accomplish literacy tasks are keys to helping them overcome their anxiety. We tell our parent participants explicitly that the methods they will use to write about the parenting project are the same as those used to write an essay or conduct research. Throughout the project we applaud their efforts as they collect data, identify strategies to try, and draw conclusions from the observations they have collected.

Organizing for the Project

The entire project lasts from 4 to 5 weeks. As a preview, we introduce the five-step model and share the following objectives for the project:

1. To identify a specific parent-child concern and observe the circumstances that relate to it (the what, when, where, and how of the problem).
2. To describe the "ABCs" of the concern.
3. To think of as many solutions as possible, enlisting the help of others and using personal learning to create a list.
4. To choose a strategy that might improve the problem and make a plan for using it at home, listing reasons why this particular strategy has been selected.
5. To try out the plan for 2 weeks, keeping a record of what is done and how the child responds, and making changes in the approach as necessary.

After our introduction, parents have an opportunity to ask any initial questions and to discuss their ideas and concerns. At the outset, most parents are reluctant to characterize parenting difficulties as "problems." A great deal of effort goes into coping with the stresses of family life, and part of this involves reassuring oneself by saying, "This is not a big problem; I can handle it." We have found it preferable to avoid focusing on problems and instead allow group members to engage in open-ended discussion of concerns they have for their children. Consequently, the parenting materials are used to support interactive problem solving and home practice. Parent handouts (summarized here but given in full in the parent handbook) focus on the five-step parent problem-solving process; they also serve as guides for parents as they assemble the written materials required for their projects.

Step 1. This step in the five-step model helps parents identify and clarify their concern. Our first handout introduces step 1 as follows:

As children grow and change, we have to change our ways of parenting. Before we can do this, we need to see and tell about what is really happening with our children and to clearly identify our particular concerns.

Here are some common parenting concerns. Is there something that sounds like your concern?

- My child lies a lot.
- My child is a picky eater.
- My child always wants his own way.
- My child never picks up her toys.
- My child hits other children.
- My child is very nervous.
- My child is very dependent.

What is a parent concern you have?

We then ask group members to conduct interviews with a partner concerning something that "bugs" them about managing their children at home. They are directed to choose a behavior that has been going on for a while and are reassured that every parent has difficult moments, so they need not be reticent or embarrassed about sharing. Pairs take turns being interviewed, and interviewers record what the other parent says using the guidelines shown in Figure 31 on page 106. Partners then exchange worksheets and use the interview notes to complete the "Make It Clear" section.

Step 2. Here we ask parents to consider the ABCs of their child's behavior—what goes on after and before, and what are the consequences. We explain that once they have identified the trigger for the behavior, thought about how they and the child respond to it, and considered its consequences from the child's viewpoint, they will be in a better position to make choices about how to address it. In this analysis, we ask parents to think about their own child and try to identify the things the child is seeking (for example, praise, attention, a new activity) along with things that the child particularly wants to avoid (such as scolding or removal of "treats").

In this step, parents are again asked to work with their partners to conduct interviews. The handout prepared for this step lists the following interview questions and reminds interviewers not to worry about spelling and grammar while preparing the interview notes:

- What happens just before? What is your child looking for? Is anything special usually going on before?
- What are you doing just before it happens?
- What happens immediately afterward? What are the rewards or consequences after he or she behaves this way?
- What do you do right after it happens?

Figure 31 Worksheet for Step 1

Parent Notes: Identify a Concern

Name: _____ Interviewer: _____

While you are interviewing your partner, jot down some of her words to help her remember. Don't worry about spelling or using sentences—these are notes.

What is the problem?

What does the child do?

When does it happen during the day? Where does it go on?

How long has it been going on? How often does it happen?

What do you do?

How do you feel about it?

Parent Notes: Make It Clear

You have talked with and listened to your interview partner and to other parents. Take time now to describe your own parenting concern. Use the notes from the interview.

In these notes, give more detail on what your child does that you want to change. Use action words to tell how your child behaves. Action words are things like "yells," "hits," or "wets the bed." Do not use value words like "moody," "mean," or "shy." These words do not tell what your child *does*. Don't worry about spelling! These are rough notes for you.

What does my child do?

When does it happen? Where?

What do I do to solve the problem when it happens?

• What rewards or consequences do you give?

Step 3. At this stage in the five-step model, parents brainstorm all the options for addressing the problem. We ask parents to make a list of possible things to do and remind them to include everything, even approaches or strategies they might on reflection think will not work. To support the parents in this activity, we distribute the checklist shown in Figure 32 and encourage them to list at least two possibilities from it.

Parents then work in pairs to identify more possible approaches and to begin the process of ranking the various ideas on their lists. Each parent in turn briefly describes the concern, and together the partners brain-

Figure 32 Parenting Strategy Checklist

Never Give Up!

Get out of a rut and try something new. Think about creative ways to do the following:

1. Avoid problems before they happen
   - reduce boredom
   - change time, place, activity
   - plan transitions (bath, bedtime, meals, leaving home)
   - prepare him or her for the new or the unpleasant
   - express clear expectations by understanding the child's present level, speaking at that level, and changing questions to commands
   - offer limited choice rather than free choice
   - use guided choice
   - follow Grandma's Rule: Follow a difficult behavior with a pleasant consequence ("If you eat your spinach, you can have some ice cream.")

2. Change what's being rewarded
   - "catch 'em" being good
   - substitute a positive for a negative consequence
   - use a time out as an alternative
   - praise more frequently

3. Find a way to teach new behavior
   - modeling
   - shaping
   - redoing it right
   - practicing
   - looking for "a better way" together

4. Change misbehavior*
   - ignoring
   - offering a substitution

*Be sure you understand the possible goals of misbehavior. Is the child looking for attention? If so, these strategies might be appropriate.

storm additional suggestions for addressing it, noting at least two possibilities. The partners then discuss all the ideas that have been jotted down and offer each other advice on the two best approaches to try. Finally, each parent selects a first and second choice for trying in his or her particular situation.

Step 4. After identifying their concern and listing possible solutions, parents are ready to develop a written action plan. We distribute a handout that takes the parents through these steps in devising the plan:

1. List specifically the behavior they want to change.
2. Note details of the behavior (the ABCs) before any changes are attempted.
3. Choose a single strategy to try and give reasons for the choice.

Step 5. This is the step in which parents keep track of their attempts, over a 2-week period, to address their concern. Parents are reminded that week 1 is a "try out," while in week 2 they can fine-tune their plan as required. A handout here asks parents to record observations in response to such questions as "What did my child do when I tried the strategy? What did I do?" Their notes help them evaluate the success of their plan and think of ways to modify it.

Experiences of Success

Over the course of the program, all the adults find answers to at least some of their concerns about parenting. We have found that they quickly internalize new ideas and begin to use words and phrases such as "modeling," "transition time," "redirecting a child's attention," "offering limited choices," and "reinforcement" during suggestion circle. They share information about resources in the community and express a greater sense of ease in their ability to cope with problems and emergencies. Most tell us that they did not realize there were so many resources and parenting strategies available.

Through the parenting project, parents are often struck by the dramatic changes that can occur when they switch from after-the-fact punishment or scolding to positive strategies and prevention. In fact, parents often report that their child's problematic behavior ends and express surprise at the influence they can exert so effortlessly with positive intervention. (In these cases, we shorten the duration of the parenting project for that parent so that he or she does not feel expected to continue if the concern has been resolved. Again, the emphasis here is on something of "real-life" value rather than on a prescribed school assignment.)

It also has been our observation that many parents incorporate literacy activities in their new routines for effective parenting. Parents who

worried about a young child's thumbsucking, whining, shyness, or bedtime struggles often see these behaviors dissipate as they structure more home literacy activities. Parents refocus and redirect children with play activities developed in Make-Try-Take, shared reading, and active conversation about the family literacy program. And throughout, parents make use of their own literacy abilities.

Parents' own voices serve as the best conclusion to this chapter. The following are comments about the Parenting component, taken from course evaluations parents complete at the end of the program:

- "I learned about different kinds of books and how to solve the little everyday problems with Mathew."
- "I learned how to have quality time with my children and more. Also, I've learned good nutrition facts."
- "I have taken a big step, after 8 years of being at home with my children, to coming back to school and what could be a better course to get me started. I have learned much about my parenting skills and many new tips and skills as a parent."
- "I have benefited that I have learned a lot that other people go through the same thing as you do."
- "I have learned not to yell as much because I learned new parenting strategies. Also I have learned how important reading to your child is."
- "I feel more confident in my mothering skills and more patient."
- "I feel I have benefited from this program because I found better ways to work out problems with my children, besides just raising my voice. This program is great, it gives you support and knowledge in parenting and makes you more aware of the better way to handle a situation."

Chapter 8

Learner Assessment and Program Evaluation

We believe that ongoing assessment provides learners with a means for noting their progress and for setting goals. Evaluation should therefore be integrated throughout a family learning program. We share our expectations for parent accomplishment with program participants, and we attempt to use evaluation strategies that are fair and negotiable. This chapter presents the framework for assessment we have constructed, which has been well received by adult learners. Our approach also contains many informal evaluation strategies that we hope will be of interest to educators working in a variety of family literacy settings.

When we were considering both learner and program evaluation, we found the work of Holt (1994) and Lytle and Wolfe (1989) particularly useful. Five principles guided our assessment decisions:

1. The diverse purposes of evaluation for various audiences (such as adults as learners and as parents, children, accrediting agencies, school administrators, and funding agencies) must be considered.
2. Evaluation decisions should be made in collaboration with learners to enhance their involvement in literacy learning.
3. No single measure can adequately evaluate the complex learning found in family literacy programs.
4. Evaluation procedures should be aligned with specific learning goals. The nature of the program's literacy experiences should direct assessment.
5. Evaluation should incorporate informal observations and the educator's own sense of learners' accomplishments.

Portfolios

As described throughout this book, parents in our program engage in a wide range of literacy activities on their own and with their children. They record observations, take notes, summarize their learning, and engage in projects from which many samples of work can be drawn. The activities we have described encompass numerous strategies that can assist parents and teachers in recording observations and information about performance in reading, writing, and parent-child interaction.

As mentioned in preceding chapters, materials developed in the learning activities are organized in portfolios in which parents store their own and their children's work. In the first week of a new term, we introduce the idea of keeping portfolios with a parent handout that describes how they will be used (Figure 33 on page 112). Because parents in the program are busy with completing activities and managing child care, there is a danger that evaluation will become strictly a teacher responsibility. Portfolios help to maintain a balance by giving parents access to the very materials that allow them to share in the review of learner performance and development.

During the first month it helps to remind parents to use the portfolios by identifying interesting work samples for them to consider including and by noting that they will see changes in their work when they review their portfolios later in the program. We conduct short individual conferences about once a month, in which the Thinking About My Portfolio portion of Figure 33 is used as a guide. During these meetings, parents and teacher review work in progress, discuss completed assignments, explore parent-child interaction, and reflect on successes and learning goals.

Figure 33 Introducing Portfolios

Portfolios help to show how much progress you and your child are making. The work you do during Parents Together Time will be kept in a portfolio. You and your teacher will have a conference each month to share your ideas about your learning, based on the work in your portfolio.

You will also keep a portfolio for your child to show how much he or she is learning during the program. You will confer with his or her teacher to discuss your child's growth and development.

What Goes Into the Parent Portfolio?

Your work, either finished or still in progress, goes into the portfolio. This includes your

- activity notebook for Family Reading and Parenting days
- planning folders for projects and assignments
- completed work (book reports, parenting project)
- personal journal (which the teacher may read and respond to only with your permission)

All of the things you are planning and collecting for the Memory Book assignment can be kept in the scrapbook itself.

Every month before your conference with your teacher, you will complete a Thinking About My Portfolio note to help you think about your work. This note will include your name, the date, and answers to the following questions:

- What do you wish to include in the portfolio this month? How is this different from last month?
- What are the things that you most enjoyed working on this month? Why?
- What do you need help with at this time?
- What does your portfolio tell about your strengths and interests?
- What does your portfolio tell about what you are learning?

What Goes Into the Child Portfolio?

You should select and keep those things that show how your child is developing in the following areas:

- social skills
- drawing, reading, speaking
- physical growth and motor development
- understanding the world

During time in the play room, you may keep track of observations of child learning and play with parent observation checklists and put these in the portfolio. Also include samples of the child's work, such as drawings, crafts, stories, or songs. Taking photos of parents and children playing, at circle time, or making crafts is a good idea.

About once a month you will meet with the children's teacher and share some things from your child's portfolio that show how he or she is learning. You will be able to tell what you think your child is learning, based on the work you choose. For example, "I chose this drawing because it is on her favorite thing this month, looking for insects. She knows the names of the different insects and even says 'metamorphosis' from the Eric Carle book. She knows which color names to use."

Formal Evaluation

Parents who successfully complete our program earn two high school credits. As such, there are certain expectations regarding tasks and assignments that will be evaluated formally as part of course requirements. At the beginning of the program, we discuss these requirements with parents, emphasizing that things they will enjoy doing will also be the basis for earning credit. Each parent receives a copy of the evaluation guidelines shown in Figure 34 on page 114. As we review this handout, parents are relieved to see that most of the course requirements are based on participation in the program.

They are also pleased to see that they can participate in their final evaluation by completing a self-evaluation. This is sometimes a difficult task for the parents, and they do tend to underestimate their achievement. We try to support their efforts by providing the common set of criteria for judging performance listed in the guidelines. In cases in which there are large discrepancies between the teacher and self-evaluations, the teacher and parent meet and attempt to reach a consensus before the final grade is submitted to the school administration.

Program Evaluation

We strongly believe that it is worthwhile to invest the extra time needed to conduct yearly program evaluations. This form of assessment is essential if we are to monitor and improve our service to families. We also have found it an asset in preparing reports to prospective and established sources of financial support. Funding agencies commonly ask questions regarding the program's effectiveness in developing adult and child literacy, the ways in which it affects home literacy practices of participant families, and the influence it has on adults' educational attainment and self-esteem. It is essential that evaluation in family literacy programs include procedures that enable practitioners to answer such questions clearly.

As is clear from the earlier chapters in this book, our program promotes learning through meaningful, authentic activities that involve participants in the creation of a wide range of products. From the perspective of program evaluation, the issue for busy practitioners is how to select representative material that will help answer basic questions about overall program effectiveness. As suggested by Holt (1994), we have found it useful to think in terms of using information collected at three time periods.

Entry

When participants first enter the program, it is important to obtain basic information about them. We conduct an interview with each par-

Figure 34 Family Learning Program Course Evaluation: Guidelines

Calculation of your final grade is weighted as follows:
1. Attendance, 10%
2. In-class participation and Parents Together Time activities
   - Make-Try-Take, 20%
   - Family Reading, 10%
   - Parenting, 20%
   - Circle time and play room time, 10%
3. Book reports, 10%
4. Parent journal, 10%
5. Memory book, 10%

Course Self-Evaluation

Give yourself a grade out of 10 in each of the following areas:
Attendance, ____ /10
Parents Together Time
- participation during Make-Try-Take, ____ /10
- creating Make-Try-Take activity, ____ /10
- participation during Family Reading, ____ /10
- participation during Parenting, ____ /10
- *Parenting project, ____ /10
- participation during circle and play times, ____ /10

*Book reports, ____ /10
*Parent journal, ____ /10
*Memory book, ____ /10

*Criteria for Evaluating Your Written Assignments

Give yourself 9 or 10 out of 10 if you
- completed the project
- made an excellent effort and produced excellent work
- paid very close attention to detail and organization of writing and any illustrations
- paid very close attention to spelling and grammar in the stages of revising and producing the final copy
- were very creative in your use of materials and/or analysis

Give yourself 7 or 8 out of 10 if you
- completed the project
- made a good effort and produced good work
- paid attention to detail and organization of writing and any illustrations
- paid attention to spelling and grammar in the stages of revising and producing the final copy
- were creative in your use of materials and/or analysis

Give yourself 5 or 6 out of 10 if you
- completed most of the project
- can show some evidence of your planning and effort
- have included the basic written elements and illustrations
- paid some attention to your revisions

Give yourself less than 4 out of 10 if you
- did not complete the project
- made little effort
- didn't include important elements
- didn't pay attention when you were revising
- produced messy-looking work

ent to obtain information pertinent to the child's health and safety, to gain insight into the adult's educational background and learning needs, and to ascertain the nature of existing literacy practices in the home. Figure 35 gives a sample interview protocol that the adult and early childhood educators use during our week of staggered entry. Interviews are usually conducted in the play room with the child present, to maintain an informal atmosphere. The interview benefits both the interviewer and the interviewee: Parents are reassured that the teachers have a special interest in them and some understanding of their children, while the teachers obtain an early sense of the caregivers' concerns and parenting styles, which is helpful for program planning.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the first week of the program we ask parents whether they will allow us to share their and their child's work with others outside the program. We explain our promise to keep all materials confidential, but we also outline the requirements we face

Figure 35 Student Enrollment Interview

Parent name and address (double-check address and telephone number for accuracy):

Child name(s) and birthdate(s):

What attracted you to the program?

How did you hear about the program?

When did you last attend high school full time?

How many credits toward your high school diploma do you have to date?

What are some of the obstacles to completing high school you've faced?

(continued)

Figure 35 Student Enrollment Interview (continued)

What are your plans in coming back to school?

Are you working now? What sort of jobs have you had in the past?

Do you have concerns about supporting your family at present?

Does your child have any medical conditions (such as allergies or asthma) that we need to be aware of or that will need attention during the program?

Have you submitted a copy of your child's immunization certificate (required for the child's program enrollment)?
Yes____ No____

Are you home with your child all the time, or do you have some other form(s) of child care available some or part of the time?

Is the child now in day care, a summer program, or some form of group program? Has she or he been in such a program in the past?

What are a few things you'd like your child to learn in the program?

Do you have any questions or concerns about the program?

Information in this section will help parents to recall family activities and events for later use in creating scrapbooks.

When and what were your child's
- first words: _____
- first steps: _____
- toilet-training experiences: _____

Were these easy or difficult periods? Why?

(continued)

Figure 35 Student Enrollment Interview (continued)

How would you describe your child's temperament as an infant? Was he or she an "easy" or "difficult" baby? Why?

What about now that your child is a toddler?

Who are the important people (siblings, friends, extended family) in your child's life?

What are some of the arrangements and routines at home for each of the following?

- bedtime and sleeping:
- mealtime and eating:
- playtime:
- other (chores, shopping, TV, etc.):

What do you want to encourage the child to do when he or she plays at home?

Do you have any books at home that your child particularly likes to read with you? What books did you read in the last week?

How often do you read with your child?

What do you like most and least about playing with your child?

What are a few things you do at home that seem to help you in taking care of, managing, or disciplining your child?

What are a few things that you do that aren't quite as effective?

in terms of program accountability. Parents each receive a copy of a permission release (Figure 36), which they are asked to complete and return. It is important to stress that agreeing to this request is *not* a requirement for entry into the program.

Some programs may administer additional measures of child development and adult literacy at the time of entry. While our Family Learning Program does not administer standardized achievement tests, such instruments can establish a baseline against which some judgments of later progress can be made. Even Start (St. Pierre, Swartz, Gamse, Murray, Deck, & Nickel, 1995) and the National Center for Family Literacy (1996) have developed such baseline assessment procedures.

Progress Monitoring

When the program is under way, methods for evaluation are selected that link program activities with family literacy objectives. Monitoring by means of observational checklists and samples from assignments, journals, and projects occurs periodically to assess changes in participation, self-esteem, performance, or parent-child interaction. In addition to reviewing

Figure 36 Parent Permission to Release Materials and Information

Dear Parent:

We are pleased to offer the Family Learning Program at Niagara Falls Secondary School. As you know, there are few opportunities for young parents to return to school. Family Learning enables parents to obtain high school credit, to meet other parents with similar interests, and to assist in their children's learning.

We would like be able to share information about the Family Learning Program so that others may benefit from our experience or assist in maintaining the program. Therefore, we would like to request your permission to explain how the program works on a day-to-day basis, show the materials you have made, and share the activities that you accomplish. Most important, we would like to show the work and learning that you do together with other parents and children.

The information may be put together as a written report, available to other educational programs. No personal information about you or your child will be included in this report. We would like to be able to use samples from your parent and child portfolios, class notes, and journals that you would be willing to share. All references to names and personal information will be omitted. In addition, some photos that illustrate how the classes operate might be included, but only with your express permission.

Please sign below to indicate whether you give your approval to share information about your and your child's participation in the Family Learning Program. Thank you.

****

I have read and understand this request for release of information. I hereby agree / do not agree (please circle one) to the release of information as described above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

child portfolios, our early childhood educator engages in systematic observation on three occasions each semester, using checklists such as that shown in Figure 37. These checklists summarize observations of child language, social skills, and concept development over the course of the program.

Figure 37 Child Observation Checklists

Child: _____

Observer: _____

Let's Observe: Language

Note the date at the top of each column, and enter your rating in each box: 1, not at all; 2, sometimes; 3, most of the time; 4, always.

Talk with other children	Date:	Date:	Date:	Notes:
• Withdrawn or ignoring				
• Aware, but does not participate				
• Cooperates				
• Initiates				
• Is directed				
• Directs				
Talk with adult				
• Reluctant				
• Initiates				
• Responds when approached				
• Maintains dialogue with ease				
Characteristics of behavior				
• Quiet/shy/timid				
• Confident/friendly				
• Dominant/aggressive				
• Uses language to focus on the task at hand				
Language usage				
• Attempts to imitate words				
• Labels objects independently				
• Uses color words				
• Uses time words				
• Uses quantity words				
• Uses number words				

Exit

As the program draws to a close, approaches are selected that allow staff to assess learners' progress from entry. To do this, we consider portfolios and the more formal learner evaluations already described. We also have found it useful to incorporate parents' observations of children (see Figure 7 on page 44), parent journals, and the reading with young children survey (Figure 16 on page 62) that parents complete in Family Reading. Finally, we ask parents to provide written feedback about the program at its conclusion. Figure 38 shows our parent feedback questionnaire.

Figure 38 Follow-Up Questionnaire

Name: _____ Date: _____

How I feel I have benefited from this program:

_____

_____

_____

_____

What I liked most:

_____

_____

_____

_____

What I would change:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Have your ideas about school or your future plans changed as a result of being in the program? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Would you recommend this program to other parents? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

(continued)

Figure 38 Follow-Up Questionnaire (continued)

Has your child enjoyed coming to the program? _____

What has he or she liked most and least about it?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Write *more*, *less*, or *the same* in the blank after each statement to best describe the situation with your child. Now that the program is ending, my child is...

- interested in and friendly with other children. _____
- cooperative (able to lead, share, follow). _____
- competitive (struggles with another to obtain what he or she wants). _____

Is your child easier or harder to manage as a result of being in the program?

_____

_____

Have your child's interests changed, or has he or she shown new interests at home (books, drawing, numbers)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Has the average length of time your child concentrates on any given activity changed as a result of being in the program?

_____

_____

What kind of knowledge or information do you think your child has acquired in the preschool program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

In general, my child has benefited from this program in this way:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions for improving the children's program:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Benefits of Evaluation

Studies have shown that retention rates in family literacy programs are higher than in traditional adult basic education programs (Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996). Adults also tend to have higher reading achievement and better rates of attendance in family literacy programs than in traditional programs. At the same time, children in family literacy programs make greater gains across several dimensions of language development, reasoning, and social relations than do children in programs without a family literacy component (Morrow & Young, 1997). Such studies provide clear examples of program evaluation that yields information about the effectiveness of family literacy.

Family literacy programs have great promise for engaging adults and children in meaningful literacy learning. Perhaps a more important benefit, however, is the development of self-esteem and confidence these programs foster in their participants. Adults who participate in family literacy programs appear to gain increased awareness of their competence as parents, greater enjoyment and involvement in their children's learning, and motivation for setting personal goals for education and career. We hope that others will be able to use ideas from this book as they develop their own programs to benefit the literacy and family lives of their participants.

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Also of interest:

Families at School: A Handbook for Parents
Adele Thomas,
Lynn Fazio,
Betty L. Stiefelmeyer
1999

What Should We Expect of Family Literacy?
Experiences of Latino Children Whose Parents Participate in an Intergenerational Literacy Project
Jeanne R. Paratore,
Gigliana Melzi,
Barbara Krol-Sinclair
1999

Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities
Lesley Mandel Morrow,
Editor
1995

In the Family Learning Program at Niagara Falls Secondary School, parents and children use literacy to strengthen their reading and writing abilities while building stronger family relationships. Parents in the program—many of whom have had negative school experiences—learn about early childhood development, discuss children's literature and reading strategies, and create literacy activities to try with their children. They also focus on parenting, sharing concerns and working on problem-solving skills. All the while, the parents use and develop their own literacy abilities through activities designed around their commitment to helping their young children grow and learn. In this program, the focus is on the children.

Families at School: A Guide for Educators describes this exemplary program from its early development and recruitment efforts through its current curriculum. The book includes background information on family literacy, suggestions for establishing a family literacy program, and ideas about program structure. Also included in this hands-on guide are sample lesson plans, lists of recommended books and resources, suggested classroom activities, examples of parents' work, and numerous student handouts. The book concludes with a discussion of assessment in the context of the family literacy program. Drawn from the authors' experience of what works with parents, these ideas and suggestions can be adapted for use in many program settings.

This guide stands on its own as a model for other family literacy initiatives. But this book also can be used with its companion volume, *Families at School: A Handbook for Parents*, a practical resource full of ideas and activities for parents who hope to develop their own literacy as a means of helping them support and nurture their children. Both books will serve as valuable resources for educators implementing and developing family literacy programs.

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INTERNATIONAL Reading Association
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ISBN 0-87207-195-2